THE CREEPING COFFINS OF BARBADOS

Chilling Riddle Of The Restless Dead

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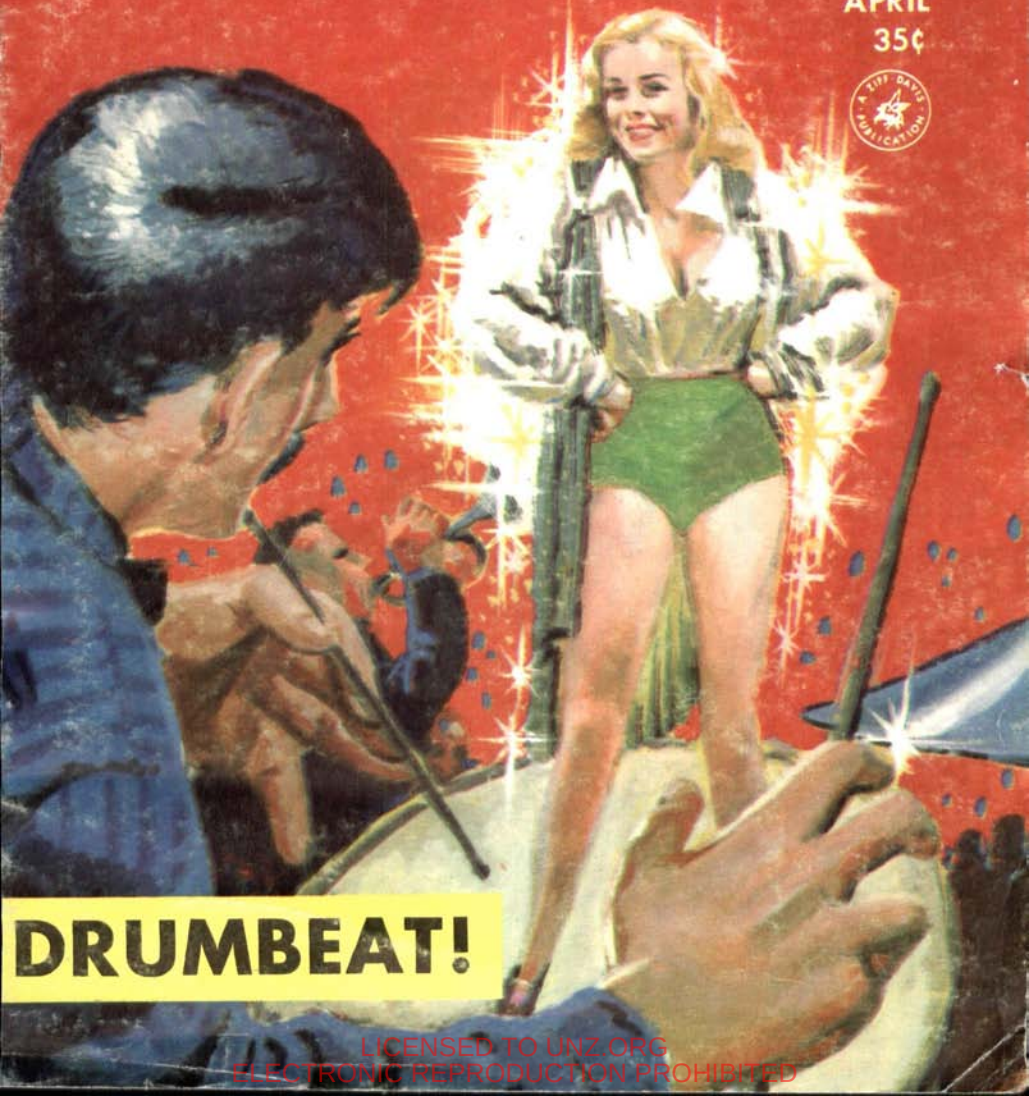

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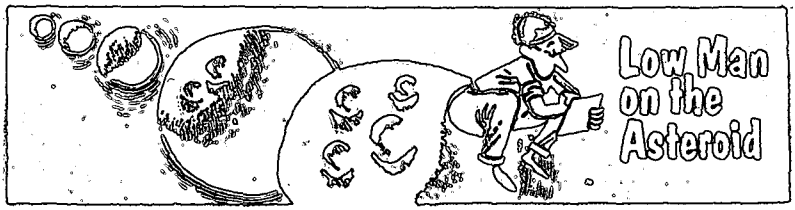

YOU'D BE SURPRISED—

—at how many popular beliefs have no foundation in fact. For instance, it's generally believed that people with red hair have fiery tempers. Not true. There is absolutely no connection between the color of a person's hair and his personality. Also, millions of people sincerely believe that, as a result of a great shock, hair can be turned white "overnight." Impossible. Even the most violent emotions have no effect on hair coloring.

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On the lighter side, it's interesting to conjecture as to what the ancients would think of us if they could see us drinking unnumbered gallons of tomato juice every morning. You see, the tomato, that excellent alkalizer, was originally considered to be an ideal sex stimulant.

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All in all, *The Treasury . . .* is a fine book for those interested in the subject.

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Cover: LEO SUMMERS

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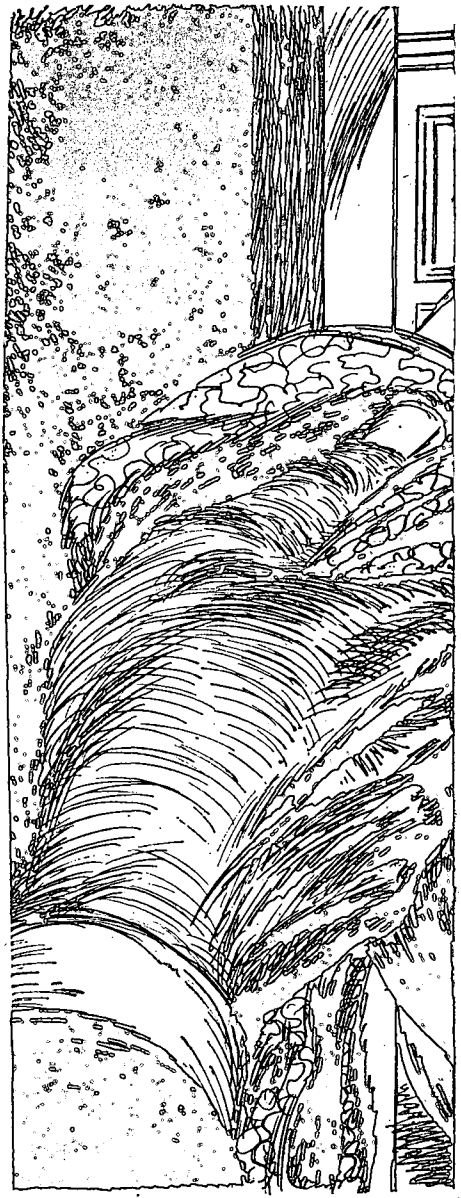
THE UNIVERSE IS MINE

By P. F. COSTELLO

ILLUSTRATOR NOVICK

Man has five senses and on the evolutionary scale appears to be developing a sixth — Intuition. This sense is already highly developed in some individuals. Therefore, this story of people even more highly sensitized is not beyond possibility.

SENATOR VOORHEES sat paring his nails with his penknife while he listened to the roll-call vote being carried out in the Senate chamber. The voice of the chairman droned on repeating the votes as they were called from the floor. And with each vote, Senator Voorhees mentally counted the tremendous political victory that his party was achieving in the passage of Bill 1145; to say nothing of the millions, no billions, of dollars it would eventually put into his and his compatriots' pockets. When his own name was called he answered almost mechanically, striving to keep



There was nothing to

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do but say hello and hand her the robe.

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the victory edge out of his voice, keep it calm and level and emotionless.

But as the vote went on, something nagged disturbingly at the back of his mind, strangely unseating the gloating confidence that he was feeling, and introducing an indefinable dissatisfaction. Bill 1145 was as good as law; why then, this unwarranted sensation of dismay? He thought of his own voice, the sound of it as he had spoken. Something . . . it hadn't rung with the exact sound he had intended. Something . . . wrong.

He stopped paring his nails and stared fixedly at the rostrum as something struggled for recognition in his mind. But now, they were announcing the vote . . .

Bill 1145 defeated . . .

Defeated!

Three quarters majority . . . *against* the bill.

Defeated!

Senator Voorhees lumbered to his feet. His face almost purple. Desperately he tried to calm himself so he could walk out of the chamber without exploding before the onlooking gallery. Stiff-legged he stalked up the aisle, seeing the exit through a red haze, his open penknife still in his hand, gripped now in fingers whose knuckles were white with pressure.

Once outside, he found other senators milling about, most of them as dazed as himself. He spied Senator Mansavage and strode up to him, eyes blazing. He gripped the senator by one lapel and almost shook him.

"Why did you vote no, you confounded double-crossing trait . . ."

Senator Mansavage wrenched his lapel loose from Senator Voorhees' fist. "What are you trying to do, stab me?" he demanded, pointing at Voorhees' knife. "As for double-crossing," his voice was an open sneer, "how did *you* vote?"

"You know damn well how I voted!" snarled Senator Voorhees. "I voted . . ." His voice faltered and his face took on a bewildered look that swiftly took on a tinge of panic. "I voted . . ."

"No!" Senator Mansavage bellowed. "You voted no, that's what you did! Now get your stinking hands off me and get out of here before I punch you in the nose!"

"I voted . . . *no*!" gasped Senator Voorhees, staggering back from the outraged countenance of his fellow senator. "My God, I voted *no*, and I thought I was voting *yes*!"

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A blank look stole across Senator Mansavage's face. "No . . ." he whispered, as though to himself. "I voted no, too! I *said* yes, but it came out *no* . . ." His face went white and he turned and staggered down the corridor. "Doctor . . ." he moaned. "Got to get to a doctor . . . my mind's . . . whirling . . ."

It was a grim-faced group who gathered together an hour later in Senator Voorhees' office. They spoke little, to avoid the necessity of making any positive statements about the thing that had happened to them.

Each of these senators knew he could not explain his apparent traitorous defection on the Senate floor. Good intentions would mean nothing.

When those accusations began, the political pot would boil over, and the resulting overflow would scald every senator in the room. And scald also, his political career. It was no wonder that none of them could find the courage to clear his throat and begin to say what all of them knew had to be said.

It was Voorhees who forced his vocal cords to the task.

"Bill 1145 has been defeated," he said in a flat voice. "For the sake of repeating the record, we'll go down the line and call for a confirmation of the votes in this room. Senator Riley?"

The senator selected to begin the agonizing confession looked sick. "I . . ." he licked his lips. "I . . . my vote is . . . down in the record as—as a negative!"

Voorhees turned to Senator Mansavage. "And yours . . . ?"

"I voted no," said Senator Mansavage.

"Crisman?"

"No."

"Jordan?"

"Ah . . . no."

And so it went, down the line, until none was left but Voorhees himself. He glared at the rest.

"I voted *yes*!" he snapped, defiantly. "I *voted* yes, but the *word* that came out of my mouth was no! And that's the way it's down on the record. Every one of us here was supposed to vote yes—every one of us spoke the word no. Any reasoning person would say we had all lost our minds. Right now, I'm not a reasoning person. It is beyond all reason to claim that our vocal cords no longer obey the dictates of our brains, but reverse their directive and thereby reverse our fortunes to a catastrophic degree. No, gentlemen, I am beyond rea-

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soning at this moment, but by god, I will certainly find out *how* this has happened, and *why*, and . . ." he paused significantly ". . . and *who!*"

He looked at Senator Mansavage. "I believe you said, immediately afterward, in the corridor outside the Senate chamber, that you'd *said* yes, but the word came out *no*. Will you *explain* exactly what you mean by such a statement?"

"You just made the same statement here!" protested Senator Mansavage.

"Of course I did," said Senator Voorhees angrily. "We all know that is what we all did —what we want to find out now is *what caused us to say it*. I want you to tell us everything, to the last trivial detail, that went on in your mind, around you in the Senate Chamber, from the time the voting began, to the time it ended."

"Well, I was absolutely certain that Bill 1145 would become a law, by a majority so large even the President could not veto it, and I scarcely gave much thought to the voting as it went on. I firmly believed, when my name was called, that the voting was going according to schedule. I realize now that at least five senators who were called upon before me had reversed their vote, but . . . *I didn't realize it then.*"

Senator Mansavage's voice took on a strained note. "If you'd asked me how Jordan, here, had voted, I would, at that moment, have positively said that his vote was for the bill, not against it. I . . . must have been so sure he voted yes, that I actually heard it that way. The no just didn't register."

"Your certainty would not have gone to the point of not knowing what your *own* vote was, would it?" asked Senator Voorhees.

"Maybe it wouldn't," said Senator Mansavage, "but it *did*."

"You mean you would have told me, had I asked you then, that you had voted affirmatively, and would have been positive of it?"

"I wouldn't have been positive. I had a strange feeling that was scarcely recognizable, that something wasn't right, but I couldn't put my finger on it. I puzzled about it until the final vote was called, and then I forgot about it in my anger against—against the rest of you!"

"When did you first realize that you had voted no?"

"After you realized you'd voted no, out in the corridor."

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"Did you notice anything at all that might give us a clue as to what it was that was affecting your mind . . . ?"

"My mind wasn't affected!" snapped Senator Mansavage. "I'm as rational as I ever was."

"I didn't mean it that way," said Senator Voorhees, "but your statement rather leaves you wide open for an argument!"

There was a chuckle from Senator Riley, but he muffled it instantly as his companions glared at him.

"I was . . . I guess I wasn't actually *thinking*," said Senator Mansavage hesitantly. "You might say that I was—well, maybe daydreaming. Not any alert thinking. One of those lapses when you find you've driven ten miles and you don't remember watching the road."

"You mean your mind was concerned with something else?"

"No. Just not really occupied. Sort of half thoughts that never got anywhere. Like the feeling something was wrong, but the lack of any real attempt at an analysis—"

"You, Jordan," said Voorhees. "How about you?"

"Same thing. Except that I was thinking, vaguely, about something else."

"What else?"

"About my—wife."

"How?"

"A sort of wishful thinking . . ."

Senator Riley laughed out loud and Senator Jordan flushed.

"Wishful about *who?*" said Senator Voorhees snidely. Then he turned to others of the assembled senators. All of them gave essentially the same story.

"Do you mean to say we just daydreamed ourselves out of our bill?" snapped Voorhees. "Haven't any of you a single clue as to what happened?"

Senator Fain spoke up. "I had the strangest feeling that I was being stared at," he said. "The feeling you get in a theater that someone behind you is staring at the back of your neck."

"I had that same feeling," put in Senator Mansavage. "As a matter of fact, I had that feeling many times during the past few weeks. Especially during the debate over Bill 1145."

"That sounds like we were being hypnotized," said Senator Voorhees.

Senator Riley's face went a shade paler. "I believe you've hit it!" he exclaimed. "For the

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past two weeks I've noticed a young man in the gallery—he's been there every day, through every session. And he certainly was staring hard at everybody!"

Senator Jordan snorted. "Ridiculous. I saw the young man myself. But if that was a hypnotic stare, I'll eat my hat. Besides, I'm no lily-brained weakling who can be hypnotized from the gallery into voting away my political future!"

"Are you saying you knew what you were doing when you voted no?" asked Voorhees dangerously.

Senator Jordan flushed. "Of course not!"

"Then you *might* have been under some sort of hypnotic influence, not necessarily from the young man in the gallery?"

"I suppose I might have. But there can be a lot of other explanations for actions such as ours. Drugs, for instance."

"A good suggestion," approved Senator Voorhees. "Any of you have reason to believe he might have been drugged."

"My habits are pretty regular," said Senator Fain. "If I have been drugged, it will be pretty easy to put my finger on all the possible persons."

"I suggest that you do exactly that," said Senator Voorhees. "I want the name of every person who could have drugged any one of us, and I want his complete record."

"What about the young man in the gallery?"

"You know what he looks like, Riley. I'll give you that job. If he's in the gallery this afternoon, get him!"

Senator Voorhees swung his gaze from man to man. "Something devilish has been going on," he said quietly. "Something that may be the most dangerous thing that has ever happened to us. I have a strange feeling that the answer isn't going to be found in drugs, or in hypnotic tricks. There was something—"

"Something what?" asked Senator Mansavage.

"I don't know," said Senator Voorhees heavily. "Something . . . unhuman."

"Unhuman?" asked Senator Mansavage blankly. "What in hell do you mean by *that*?"

"What in hell may be precisely the meaning," said Senator Voorhees. "If I *knew* what, I wouldn't be calling in John Macreal to look for the answer."

"Who's John Macreal?"

"He's the best man Central Intelligence has. He's the man who ruined the Russian grab

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for Egypt. He's the man who decoded the temperature readings from the Sputnik, and made it possible for us to record the cosmic ray count so that it made sense to our scientists."

"Sounds like a good man."

"The best," said Senator Voorhees. "If he can't find out anything about this, nobody can!"

"Then put him on!"

"He's already been working for over an hour," said Senator Voorhees with a grim smile. "He has a recording of everything that went on in this room. I trust none of you gentlemen have any reason to object?"

"None at all," said Senator Mansavage stiffly. "Especially since now we'll have *two* records."

"Two?"

Senator Riley, for the third time, broke into a roar of laughter. "And baby makes three!" he guffawed. "Maybe we ought to play all three back at the same time. We'd get a nice tonal effect!"

"But still human," pointed out Senator Fain.

"You've got us there," said Senator Voorhees. "And I'm afraid you're right. What's happened today is beyond any of us. And somehow, we've got to find out."

In the room next door, John Macreal laid down his earphones and snapped off the tape recorder. He packed up the machine, and a few moments after the last senator had passed his door, opened it silently and walked out of the building. Passing a mail box, he dropped a package containing the tape he had just recorded into the slot and continuing on to the parking lot, stowed his recorder in his car. Then he went slowly back to the Senate restaurant and found a table in the corner. Senator Voorhees joined him there.

"How did it strike you?"

"Between the eyes," said Macreal. "What I have just learned would look pretty rotten to the American Public. You know, of course, that I'm on the other side of the fence in that regard."

"Yes. I know. But your boss is on our side."

"I mailed the tape to him."

"Don't worry, there are two more," grinned Voorhees.

"Two more? Who?"

"Riley and Mansavage."

"They could be suspects."

"I doubt it."

"I'm afraid I agree. But there is one fellow . . ."

"That man in the gallery. Yes. You be on hand in the gallery this afternoon; watch

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when Senator Riley points him out. Get there before Riley's men."

"Naturally."

"Good. After that, you're a free agent. You know as much as I do now, and regardless of your loyalties, I can assure you of one thing—whatever is happening can be used for other purposes than merely defeating a political coup! I think you realize that. The safety of America itself is at stake. This thing is so damnably insidious it frightens me. I meant it when I called it unhuman."

"I think you're right there, Senator. With a weapon like that, Hitler could have ruled the world in two weeks!"

There was a buzz of conversations as the senators filed into the Senate chamber. Up in the gallery, John Macreal sat quietly in his seat near the door. He was eyeing every person in the gallery, mentally eliminating one after the other. Finally he narrowed his suspicions down to two men, one of them wearing a dark blue serge suit, the other a gray pin-stripe. After a moment of study, Macreal eliminated the man in the blue serge suit. He fixed his attention on the other man. He was young, perhaps thirty, tall, handsome, and with piercing black eyes. Macreal nodded to himself.

He drew a note pad from his pocket and scribbled something on it. He read it back calculatingly. *Get out of here,* it said. He folded it carefully several times, then flicked it into the air with his thumb. It sailed in an arc across the gallery, and landed on the lap of the young man in the gray pin stripe. It remained on one knee as though glued there.

The young man picked it up, glanced around the gallery. Macreal sat with his chin on his palm, lazily studying the floor below. He leaned back, took his notebook out, made an elaborate notation. Then he resumed his observations, and once more cupped his chin in his palm. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the young man read the note.

For a moment the young man sat silently, then very casually got to his feet and began climbing the stairs toward the door. Just as he passed through it, two men sitting in the top row got hastily out of their chairs. Down on the Senate floor Macreal had caught Senator Riley gesturing too, and he rose to his own feet swiftly. On the dead run he approached the two men who were converging on the

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door through which their quarry had gone. All three men reached the door at the same time, and all three went down in a heap.

"After him!" Macreal barked angrily.

One of the Riley men growled, "Who the hell are you—" But he didn't have time to say more because Macreal was racing down the corridor toward the street exit. The man in the pin stripe was just vanishing through the door.

Behind Macreal the pounding feet of the two Riley men echoed loudly in the corridor. Without pausing, Macreal raced into the street, turned in the opposite direction from that taken by the man in the pin stripe, and bore around the next corner. He slowed down somewhat and as the two Riley men caught up with him, he was coming to a baffled halt.

"He gave us the slip," he panted.

"Gave *us* the slip!" roared one of the Riley men. "Why you damned fool, you've let him get away with your clumsy . . . who are you, anyhow?"

"I'm working for Senator Voorhees," said Macreal. "He didn't tell me there'd be anybody else on the job. Who you working for?"

The Riley man groaned. "A job as big as this, and those jackasses can't work together! Well, we'll never find the guy now. We don't even know what he looks like from the front. You get a look at him?"

Macreal shook his head. "He was in front of me. But he had red hair . . ."

"Red hell! He was a blond!" snorted the Riley man. "Come on, Joe, let's go back to Riley."

The two men turned and walked angrily away. Macreal grinned after them, then his gaze grew thoughtful. "There were too many of us there," he said to himself. "Now I'll have to go back to my office and wait until he calls on me —if he calls!"

He went back to the parking lot, got his car, and drove to his own private office. Once there he settled himself in an easy chair with a magazine and began reading.

She was the kind of a girl you didn't use adjectives to describe. You just said she was beautiful and let it go at that. Nobody would deny that you were right. Macreal stared at her as she came toward the open door of the inner office.

"What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to engage your

(Continued on page 100)

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The Man On The Island

By BRYCE WALTON

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

No doubt many people think of fantasy as an individualized—and thus rather restricted—literary structure. Actually, no other form of the written word has a wider range. Fantasy reaches from "Alice in Wonderland" to "Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde"; from Hans Christian Andersen to Henry James and his "Turn of the Screw." A great deal of fantasy's power lies in the leeway it gives the writer for creation of mood. In this story, Walton has achieved a strangely fragile mood without deserting stark reality.

THERE he is," Larry said. He pointed to a table under a lurid painting of the sunset. She turned to look at their victim. The so-called Duke of Capercaillie, Joseph Kronmetz, was disappointing. He was short, paunchy, bald and damp looking. He promised to be a bore. But then, wasn't everything?

Even the Casino of the Palms with its can-can dancers was a bore. The Riviera was the dreariest bore of all. "He doesn't," she said, "look any more like a Duke than you do."

"He is. And I've arranged for you to meet him in ten minutes."

She remembered the last one, an old American who dealt in textiles, someone named MacDonagh. Larry had had to kill MacDonagh. Somehow, he had found out her identity, and he had to be killed. Thinking of that made her feel tired, truly exhausted.

"I hope he isn't a phony," she said.

"Do phonies drop ten million francs on a croupier's table then walk away before the wheel stops, saying, 'Why wait, I know it's an unfortunate bet?' "

She felt a tinge of interest and looked at Kronmetz again. Somehow, he did appear vaguely rich. He still stared at her with those colored glasses while he sipped brandy. She and Larry were down to a mere 60,000 francs. "He already seems interested," she said.

"If he sees you," Larry said, smiling, "he sees only the

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The ghosts of victimized men blackened her past—poisoned her future.

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image I painted of you for his hungry little soul. He's blind."

She felt irritated, for she had spent some time preparing herself for a seduction. She shrugged creamy white shoulders and crossed long slim legs. "He can't *see* me?"

"He's probably a master of the touch-system by now, and he's more the spiritual type I understand. Anyway, what does that matter? This is the time when we make the big haul."

Perhaps this would be simpler and less exhausting and frustrating. Being appreciated by men whose sensitivity to her charms only resulted in estrangement was depressing. Though one had to live well, the means had sometimes been unpleasant. Particularly in the case of MacDonagh.

"He lives," Larry said, "in some big ancestral pile on an island. He's here looking for the woman of his dreams. He's been doing this periodically for years. He always comes to Quinze, convinced that it attracts the most beautiful women in the world. The fact that he keeps returning means that he has always been either completely disappointed, or that he is easily bored."

She crossed her legs and smiled as her hazel eyes darkened to this unexpected challenge.

"I doubt if you'll bore him, but in case you might, the idea is to work fast. He must have plenty of family jewels and cash stashed away out there. Get it and get out. Unless, of course, you con him into something more permanent and rewarding over a longer haul. He has a heart ailment, so in case of trouble, you know what to do. I'll give you the stuff before you take off with this guy."

"I couldn't do that."

"This time you may have to. I won't be around. Just put it in his coffee or wine, and it's diagnosed as heart-failure. Don't pretend you couldn't do it. You were as much responsible for what happened to MacDonagh as I was." Larry finished his brandy and looked at his watch.

"Who, or what, am I this time, Larry? Better face me in on the routine."

"You're a lover of poetry and the arts, and you've written stuff, too. You're a lover of sweet, sad song. This Duke's an eccentric, blinded during the war, used to write poetry. An aesthete. But poetry is his first love. You have the invisible attributes. You have a nice cultured voice, a certain familiarity with the arts. Here,

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I've prepared a little dope sheet for you."

He handed her a sheet of paper upon which was typed a number of quotations from famous poets. "The Duke's blind. He won't know you're reading it off. He's looking for something special. Feel him out."

He handed her a ragged pamphlet.

"Remember poor starving Jacque in Paris? Not a bad poet, maybe. Who knows? I'm sure the Duke never heard of Jacque. Who has? He had a hundred of these printed up for his friends—those who could buy him a meal. I had another binding put on it. You are now Drusilla de Vere, author of *Flowers on a Plain*. If he wants to hear any of your stuff, this is it. Keep some of it back in case he wants you to compose something new. Then you won't have any trouble."

Larry was clever. He was ugly and mean and without human principles, but he was clever at arranging lucrative liaisons. She detested him, and herself, but he objected sometimes to her undisguised distaste for him.

"Kronmetz is probably insane," Larry said. "But that should make it simpler."

Then Larry introduced her to Kronmetz as, "The lovely lady I was telling you about," and dismissed himself.

The Duke asked her what she wanted to eat and drink, then ordered for her. She felt uneasy under his blind yellow-lensed stare.

"You do have a beautiful voice," he said, hesitantly.

"Thank you. I was told that you love beauty."

"Yes. But I can't see it now. I used to see it. But remembering isn't easy. Without sight, memory dulls. The eyes, Miss de Vere, are the windows of the soul."

"But the soul is immortal."

"I'm trying to preserve mine. You appreciate poetry? You are a poet, I understand. Who are your favorites?"

Quickly she scanned the paper and said her favorites were Shelley, Byron and—James Joyce. How did he get in there, she thought?

She forced herself to quote as though from memory, "'Yet I endure. I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt? I ask yon Heaven, the all-beholding Sun, has it not seen? The sea, in storm or calm, Heaven's ever-changing Shadow, spread below, have its deaf waves not heard my agony? Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever.'"

Kronmetz was impressed.

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His voice was excited. "'How sweet it is to sit and read the tales of mighty poets and to hear the while sweet music, that when the attention fails, fills the dim pause.'"

"Lovely," she said.

"It's a coincidence, Miss de Vere. But I like Joyce's poetry. His prose is pretentious and a bore, but his poetry is so incredibly delicate. Like floating crystals."

"Yes," she said, then read from the quotation labeled Joyce. "'Strings in the earth and air make music sweet, strings by the river where the willows meet.'"

"Beautiful," Kronmetz said. "Would you mind reciting a bit of your own work?"

Quickly she opened the pamphlet of Jacque's poetry and read, "'And strange ruins on a plain, and strange sockets in the brain where mosses spring and twisted flowers bring fragrance and self-devouring pain. Red hawk and hawk white, red dove, white dove, devour each other. And each to the other is red or white, hawk or dove, devouring with madness or with love. There are strange ruins on a plain. A scarlet flower that dies, and stones on stones that rise and again fall. Strange ruins on a plain."

Unexpected fear moved in her. She half-believed those disquieting words were her own. She had read it well, with feeling and she had the sudden uneasy sensation that the feeling had been, in part at least, genuine.

Kronmetz's yellowish lenses gazed at her face for perhaps five minutes. Then he whispered, "*Magnifique!* What visual imagery. It is so rare. I want to hear more, much more. We shall get along very well."

"It's from a collection," she said. "Called *Flowers on a Plain.*"

"So we all are," he said. "And the seasons are so short. Tell me," he said, leaning across the table, "what do you see *now?*" His face was tense.

She felt a momentary doubt so frightening it was like paralysis.

"Now?"

"I cannot see, you understand? I want you to see all this for me. What do you see?"

She pressed one hand close against her stomach, and breathed deeply. She looked across the smoke of the Casino of the Palms. Something deeper than fear moved inside her, waves of threatening giddiness. She didn't want to see anything, she thought. She had been so many places, seen so much, and had seen noth-

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ing. She felt unsafe, suddenly and frighteningly alone, yet the challenge had to be met.

She tried to remember how it had been long ago, when she sat alone, looking at life, feeling it, even touched with awe because of it.

"The gay music," she began haltingly, "turns blue and somberly cuts the air. No, it consumes the air and is part of it like smoke. It is part of the air, part of a sickness. It is the cry of the hounded. It fills this weary rich cafe. These people have no tongues. There is no voice in them but this dead music. This smoke, this music fills their lungs as they suck in cigarettes. Their eyes are dull with the rhythm and their hearts bump with it. They have no voice and they long for a voice. But they sit dumb and suck clamor into their lungs and silently breathe it out. You see no faces, you see only the smoke and a glitter in it, the glitter of legs, mouths, and horns, and you let yourself slowly through it, in blue that swirls and mixes with a smoky air."

She leaned against the table. She touched the napkin to her perspiring lips. She felt his hands holding one of hers and she was looking into the yellow lenses.

"Let's leave this place," he said. "Do you want to stay with me?"

"Yes," she said.

"Can you drive a car?"

"Yes."

"Good. We shall drive past the Mount to the Cape of Palms. You will describe it to me, the cold black Mediterranean moonlight."

The many rooms of the Chateau de Capercaillie were still museums. The pile of stones merged with blue sky and blue ocean, seemed to float like an illusion above the peninsula. The servants lived in their own shacks down the curve of the beach. "They are," Kronmetz said, "crude but necessary intrusions."

She had a room, large and damp, lined with books and rare paintings. It had a stone fireplace. It had casement windows opening over the sea.

Their first night together out there, they sat in a dark room. He never touched her, but asked her to tell him how the sun set, the way stars appeared breaking out, the effects of moonlight on the water.

"You must be beautiful," he said. "Look at yourself there in the mirror. Stand there and make me see you."

She felt weak, as if she had been drugged. She had to lean

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against the heavy bedpost as she looked at unfamiliar contours, naked and blurred in the glass.

She knew that she had not honestly looked at herself for years, had almost forgotten what she had been long ago when she had looked at herself. She was not the same now.

"I see a sad song," she said slowly, "that tries to erase a dull day. There's a painted smile looking out of a pale winter. Useless love, ghosts haunting an old closet."

She saw other forgotten images, too. The faces of men whom she had made love to and turned into dupes and fools and she heard her and Larry's laughter as they counted the take. And there was the dead dancing face of MacDonagh laughing at her, taunting her.

Then she looked up at the concerned face of Kronmetz bending over her. She lay on the bed. She couldn't remember ever having fainted before.

The drugged feeling persisted. She walked with Kronmetz day and night. It was like a dream. She couldn't get away from Kronmetz. She found a fortune in jewels, and managed to accumulate handfulls and hide them in her suitcase. But she couldn't get away from Kronmetz.

He would lie beside her, touching her the way he might have tried to feel the color in a painting. He didn't demand physical love. For what purpose, he said, would we lie here mouth to mouth? A rehearsal for tomorrow's show? He didn't want her body.

He only wanted her eyes.

"You see things the way I saw them once," he said. "Your eyes will the windows of my soul."

He talked with sudden flares of rage of the others, the countless others, who had promised so much, and had been able to see nothing but banalities explained in cliches and platitudes.

She began to wonder what had happened to all the others. Larry hadn't mentioned that. She was frightened and sent letters to Larry when the mailboat left for the mainland. He was staying at the Hotel Napoleon.

She had the jewels, a fortune in jewels. But how was she to escape? She had to stay with Kronmetz night and day. The servants wouldn't speak to her.

Twenty-four hours a day she saw things for Kronmetz. The paintings. The peasant boy on a bicycle. A ship on the

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horizon. The waves on the rocks. The gulls over the water.

Time became a fearful necessary and constant exposure to new and strange sensations.

The world seemed to have altered, tilted, and she had to fit into it, see it the way he wanted her to see it. She was afraid to drift out of it even for a minute.

How he hated those others who had failed to see things right.

The night, she said, stretched from day to day like a long tunnel. The cliff was no longer the cliff she had seen a thousand times, but something that trimmed its dress with ruffled ocean surf and wore a shawl of whitened seabird's nests.

The sleepy sun didn't sink, it prepared for the rape of night. The moon in tattered clouds begged star-dust from the sky. The spider wove a spun-glass spell. The bird traced a paragraph of song on the windy blue page of the sky. The grass was stitched by the weeds' luxuriant yawn. Rain was a patient dogged fisherman digging up worms.

It was as if she had never really heard rain before on leaves, or the way tired stars couldn't help blinking their eyes. Or the marks a cat's tongue left on the back of a hand. Or the appearance of a shelf of books. Or of how fire was alive and how a dog slept before it dreaming.

Rain drops made circles on water. Rain was a mystery, and it teased above the ground a small green head and made it flower. She saw a hand in water. A woman swinging brown fish from a dangling string. The sand like tears of fine gold dust. Fingers of mist grasped out in greedy expectation. Along the beach, the lace on coral fans, and black pearl eyes simpering like falling crystal bubbles, and gold darting in mouldering haunted castles.

After weeks passed there was no answer from Larry.

She dug the phial from the bottom of the suitcase. She forgot MacDonagh. Her only escape would be to poison Kronmetz. But the phial was empty.

Perhaps Kronmetz had found it, and emptied it. She never found out why it was empty. She got out the small pearl-handled .25-caliber pistol. It had no shells in it. The chamber had been emptied.

She tried to escape, carrying the jewels in a small handbag. She was caught and brought back by a sullen man and woman smelling of sea-

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weed and stale fish, who never said anything.

Kronmetz only asked why she had left him, left him in his pitiful darkness.

She wrote more letters to Larry at the Hotel Napoleon. She knew they got off all right. She sneaked down to the wharf and saw that they got on the mailboat. She tried to get the man who ran the mailboat to take her to the mainland, but he refused.

Two weeks later, she knew Larry wasn't going to answer. She had no idea why. Perhaps he had been arrested.

That night there was a storm. Kronmetz made her see it for him. It seemed that she had never seen a storm before this one.

The storm came this time with flashing weapons, javelins of light, with blows of fists on mountains sounding like rolls on a drumhead. And then the storm went away, and it left the beaten mountains drenched in the blood of the gasping, wounded skies and wrapped in green shrouds.

Later he wanted her to see the mountains for him.

They were giants pushing away a fretful sky.

He had left her alone a few minutes. He had not said anything for several days. He was nervous and irritable. He fell into rages.

Once he sobbed like a child.

He came into the shadowed room and she turned with a gasp of fear.

He shuffled toward her like a hesitant child, a timid child trying to see in the dark.

"You should be happy here, but you aren't, are you?"

"Yes, I'm happy," she said. She didn't dare tell the truth.

"You aren't happy at all. You don't really love beauty and if you do—then why aren't you happy?"

"I said I was happy."

"You see beauty anyway, even if you don't appreciate it as you ought to. Did you ever think that you would die some day? Then what about me? Where will I be then?"

She felt the wind from the open window against her shoulders as she backed away from him. She had not been sure, but now she could see the knife in his hand.

"You will die, or you might even run away," he said.

He ran his hand over her face and touched her eyes. . . .

Larry Doran boarded the Paris Express for the Spanish border. He would spend a long leisurely season at Majorca. He thought of her for a while and then decided to forget her

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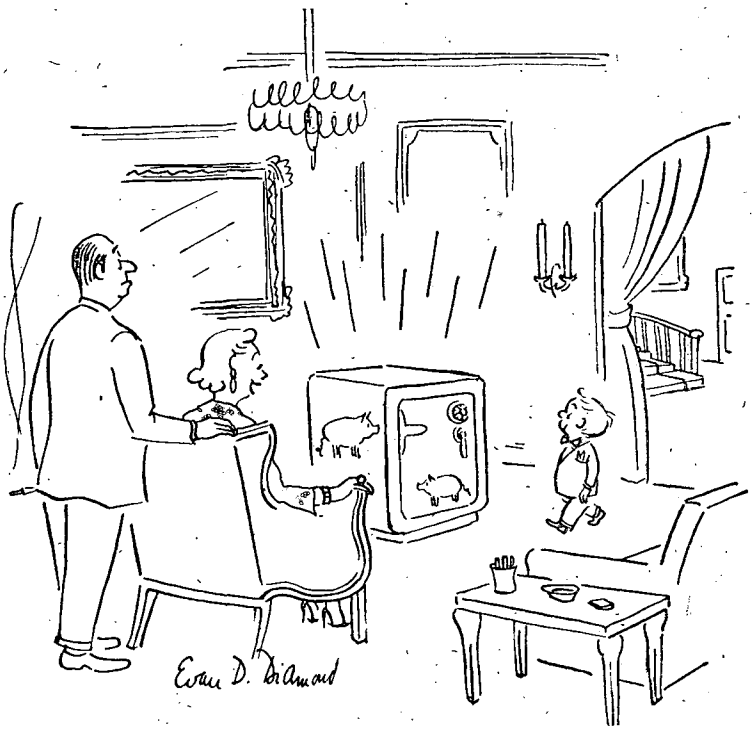
completely. As far as he was concerned, the past had been a hectic hand-to-mouth business and he was through with it. He was rich. The world was his oyster.

She had gotten to be a bore. Still, he wondered what had happened to her out there on Kronmetz's private little island. A lot of people wondered about what had happened to some of those other women the Duke had picked up in Quinze and taken over there, but most of them were tramps anyway, like she had always been, and no one really cared.

All Larry knew or cared about now was that Joseph Kronmetz had paid him a fortune for her eyes. **THE END**



"Your father's bought you a new toy, dear . . . a piggy bank."

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Conversation Piece

By BILL MAJESKI

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

You can meet the darnedest people in bars! All Russell Timmons wanted was a beer —something to take his mind off Genevieve. And there was Marlene, waiting to teach him all about life—or so it appeared.

RUSSELL TIMMONS dried the last dish in the pile and placed it carefully on the shelf. Then he took off his apron and hung it on the hook behind the kitchen door.

"Thank you, baby mine," called his wife, Genevieve, from the living room. He winced at her nickname for him, one she had made up the first week of their marriage and had hung onto for their 10 years together.

Genevieve was sprawled out on the sofa, reading a *Real Thrilling Confession* magazine and nibbling away at some bon-bons. She ate an average of six bon-bons for every confession story she read. Russell judged from the contents of the box that she had read two stories and was about halfway through the third.

"Well, dear," he said brightly, "how many children born out of wedlock so far?"

"Three," she answered, before thinking, "going on four." Then she came awake and threw her book down. "Oh, don't be so funny. These people really suffer. You don't know what it is to suffer."

Russell had a pretty good answer ready for that, but he decided to save it for a more opportune moment.

"I can't see what pleasure there is in reading about women who meet with a fate worse than death and have children," he told her.

"Lots of women read these magazines. They're very popular."

"If they're that popular, maybe I can start a confession magazine of my own and call

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Russell could visualize almost anything where Marlene was concerned.

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it Maternally Yours, the Magazine for Unwed Mothers, or the Illegitimate Quarterly, or the . . . ."

"Never mind, just be sure you bring the garbage down on your way to the store," she told him, losing herself in the book, and reaching for another bon-bon.

"Down, down, down," Russell said. "Just once I'd like to bring the garbage up, just to see what would happen."

Genevieve sighed heavily and Russell left the room.

Damn it, she was a strong-willed woman, he thought, as he began packing the garbage in the can. If she wasn't so pretty, she'd really be easy to hate. Genevieve held the reins and Russell jumped when he felt the whip.

He had long since given up actively trying to stage a revolt and gain the upper hand with her. His progress along these lines was limited to daydreams to and from work as he commuted into the city.

Yes, Genevieve was a strong woman, but she knew her way around socially. She knew how to handle his fellow workers and the top executives when they dropped over for dinner or party. In fact, it was her attention to O. B. Odell that led to Russell's recent promotion. He knew she deserved all the credit for that. She knew it also, and occasionally reminded him of it.

She was at the controls in all their relations, and that meant *all* their relations.

Russell went into the parlor and bent over to kiss his wife before going downtown. She was wearing a tight, white blouse and dark green skirt which showed off her lovely body. He put his lips to her curled blonde hair and brushed against her forehead and then to her mouth, as he ran his hand along her waist and up the side of her body. She pulled away from him.

"Not now, baby mine," she said, in the tone of a matron telling an orphan he couldn't play just then. "Be a good boy and we'll see about it later."

Russell gave up. He knew it was no use. He felt like kissing her and holding her, but she didn't and that was that. That had always been that.

He slid his car into a parking space right across the street from the supermarket.

The store was packed with people scurrying with their children, pushing the carts, getting their weekend shopping done before the stores

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closed at 9 p.m. It was crowded, too crowded for Russell to fight. He stopped in at the Hotel Grandview for a drink.

The Grandview was the city's biggest hotel and got most of the wealthier tourists and visitors. The bar was long and dark and cool and the juke box was kept down soft to give the drinker an even chance to hear himself think.

Russell sipped his beer and saw Genevieve before him, lying on the couch, snuggled up with a confession magazine and a box of bon-bons. He tightened up and took another sip. He took another pull and felt something or someone looking at him. He looked into the mirror in a sly effort to see who was staring at him. He couldn't see anyone. He had to turn and face the person directly. He did.

It was a woman. Not a beautiful woman, but a woman some people would call exotic, even though they might not know the meaning of the word. Her eyes were dark and friendly though her face remained very calm and casual. It was as if she were inspecting him with thoughts of buying him by the pound.

Russell tried to match stares with her, but failed. He went back to his beer. He felt some commotion right next to him and turned. It was the woman. She seemed to be smiling now.

She plopped herself on the stool, crossed her legs in a neat display of silk and leaned over to Russell.

"You look as lonely as I feel, mister," she smiled. "Why don't you let me buy you a drink and we'll cry into each other's martini?"

Russell looked at her brown eyes and her ripe, red lips. But she wouldn't buy him a drink, no sir. He was sick of aggressive women. They'd have a drink together, all right, but he'd pay for it.

"I'd like to cry in your martini," he said, and signalled the bartender and told him to set up a couple. "But I'm buying."

"All right," she smiled. She had bright, even teeth. "Do you live in town?" she asked, as she moved closer to him.

He nodded. "Do you?"

"No, I'm traveling through to Philadelphia. Meet a boy friend there."

"That's fine. Every woman should have a boy friend," Russell said.

"I agree. That's what I told my husband."

Russell tried hard to seem worldly. "I'm sure he understands."

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"No," she said, with a trace of a pout, "he doesn't. That's the trouble. That's why we're separated."

The bartender brought the drinks and they sipped them in silence.

"What's your boy friend like?"

"I don't know," she said. "I've never met him."

"You said you were going to Philadelphia to meet him."

"I am. I think Philadelphia is a nice place to meet a boy friend. What do you think?"

Russell didn't know what to think and he said so. She asked him his name and he told her. She said hers was Marlene Doxey. Russell said that was a nice name and they drank a bit more from their martinis. Russell asked where she was staying and she said the hotel. He said that was fine. They ordered two more martinis.

"What will your boy friend look like?" he asked.

"I'm not quite sure. But I'll know. He'll have nice eyes and be friendly and good. And he won't be an old maid. He'll be modern and up-to-date and won't think that sex is something nasty."

"I don't think it's nasty," said Russell. "I think it's nice."

"Now you're talking my language," she said. "Too many people treat sex like it was typhoid fever."

"Far too many," agreed Russell. "It's not like typhoid fever at all."

"You can say that again," she said. "Sex is something that should be talked about. *Sex, sex, sex,*" she shouted. Russell leaned over quickly and pressed her arm.

"Sssshh. Be quiet. Let's talk about sex, but let's not shout," he cautioned.

"I guess you're right," she said. "But I get so sick of all this hypocrisy about sex. I come from a strict family and so does my husband. They think double beds are sinful."

"I think double beds are great," said Russell.

"They're my hobby."

"All married people should have them."

"And all single people, too," she said. She gulped down her martini and the bartender came over ready to make a couple more. "Let's not keep sex under a blanket," she said, too loudly. "Let's talk about sex. Let's bring sex out into the open. Don't you agree?"

Russell shrunk away a bit as she raised her voice and looked to see if any of his friends were at the bar. The bartender listened to her and shrugged.

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"Well," he began, "sex should be out in the open, but not too open, if you know what I mean."

"You're all right, buddy," she said. "Now mix two more martinis and don't cheat on the gin." She turned to Russell who had finished his brief inspection of the room and was satisfied none of his acquaintances were present.

Russell said, "I'll pay. It's the man who pays."

"Sometimes I think the woman ought to pay, just to give the man a treat. But then, a woman has far better means to give the man a treat." She smiled and moved closer.

Russell's head made a complete circle as he again checked the bar for acquaintances. He was safe. He moved closer and her hands went into his and her fingers moved slowly over his hands. Russell sipped his martini and loosened his collar.

Her eyes looked out at the huge collection of bottles which lined the back of the bar.

"Wouldn't it be nice if they labeled man like they labeled whiskey?" she smiled. "Then you could tell what kind of a man you'd be getting. Eliminate the guesswork."

"Might not be a bad idea," Russell said. "Have a national testing ground. The good men would be labeled '100 proof, bonded.' Some would be blended and others straight."

"That's right," she said. "For instance, *Johnny Walker*, mild and satisfying. If a girl married *Johnny Walker*, she'd know what to expect."

"How about *Old Taylor?*" Russell asked.

"Let's see. *Old Taylor*, I think *Old Taylor* would be sure to please. And you won't have to be vague, get *Haig and Haig.*"

"They're brothers, aren't they?"

"Well, we could fix them up with a pair of sisters. *Old Fitzgerald*, improves with age. Some girls like older men. I guess *Old Fitzgerald* would agree with a certain type. Not me though, I like someone younger. Like you."

The bartender was near again and Russell tried to make out she wasn't holding his arm and nuzzling him, but he failed. The girl was holding his arm and nuzzling him and the bartender saw it quite plainly.

"Well, as long as sex isn't too open," the bartender repeated, picking up his part of the conversation from before. "You know what I mean?"

"You bet, buddy," Marlene

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said with a wink. "I know what you mean. Let's keep sex on the up and up. Let's talk about sex."

"I'll buy that," said the bartender with some spirit. "And this round is on me."

"Another sex fan," Russell ventured.

"Everybody is," Marlene said. Then she leaned back and gave a big yawn accompanied by a handsome stretch which showed her lines to best advantage. Eight drinkers along the bar put down their glasses to stare. She finished her prodigious stretch and the men went back to their drinking.

"I'm getting tired," she said. "Care to accompany me up to my room?" Fortunately, she had said this in a low voice, so that only Russell heard. He gulped and considered it. But only for a second. Then he belted the rest of his martini and took her arm.

"What's your room number?"

"No. 234, and if a man answers it's a private detective," she said, the martinis now beginning to slur her words a little.

"You take the elevator and I'll meet you there in 10 minutes."

"Okay, Russell. Don't forget. I'll be waiting."

Nine minutes later he was in her room, closing the door behind him.

She slumped into a chair and Russell sat nervously on the edge of the bed. This was a wholly new experience for him.

"Don't be so edgy," she said. "Come over here and run your hand through my hair or something and tell me that you think sex is beautiful."

Russell did so. Suddenly he was kissing her and she was kissing him. She clawed at him and clung as she pulled him close to her. Her lips found his mouth and stayed there. She was being the aggressive one, Russell thought and he didn't want it that way. He was sick of aggressive women. This time he was going to be the boss.

He stood up and placed his arm under her and swung her to her feet and then picked her up bodily. She looked at him in surprise.

"What are you doing?"

"Sex is beautiful," he said.

"Nothing to be ashamed of," she said.

"Nothing to hide under blankets," he whispered.

She kissed him forcefully, but then Russell tore away and became the aggressor. Now he would be the masterly man, the one leading the way. It was a

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fine feeling. But she twisted unexpectedly and wiggled away from him.

"What's wrong?" Russell asked.

"Nothing. But we shouldn't be doing this."

"What? Sex is beautiful. We shouldn't hide it. Free and easy, that's the ticket," he said. "We should talk about it."

"That's right," she said. "Let's talk about it." She stood up. "It's better to be able to talk about it."

"Only talk?" asked Russell.

"Talk," she said, looking at him and smiling. "It helps you overcome fears. If you talk about it, you won't be afraid of it anymore."

She smiled at him. "Thanks a lot, Russell. Thanks for letting me talk. I feel better now. The hell with Philadelphia, I'm going back to my husband in Boston."

Russell drove into the driveway and didn't bother to put the car inside the garage. He bounded up the steps and went inside.

Genevieve had fallen asleep on the couch, the *Real Thrilling Confessions* open on her stomach, and the box of bonbons completely empty.

He took off his jacket quickly and threw it over a chair. He went over and kissed her solidly on the lips until she woke up.

"What are you doing, baby mine?"

"Knock off that baby mine bit, will you?" he asked. He got his hands under her and lifted her up and swung her over his shoulder like a sack of wheat.

"Where are the groceries?"

"Now don't bother your pretty little body about the groceries," he said, as he switched off the light and started with her for the stairs.

"What are you . . ." she began.

"It's beautiful," he said.

"What do you . . ."

"Let's get it out in the open," he said, as they reached the top of the stairs and entered their room.

"Russell, please . . ."

"I will please. Guaranteed. I'm bonded. I'm mild and satisfying. Don't be vague, I'm not a bad egg."

"Let me talk to you . . ." Her voice was getting softer.

"It should be talked about."

Not the time to talk about it now, though. He placed her down gently. Then her arms were clutching him and she was raising up to kiss him hard and long.

THE END

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THE MANY WAYS OF DEATH

By KENNETH O'HARA

ILLUSTRATOR DUNCANSON

It came from space and there was no defense against it. Invulnerable to our weapons, it spread panic and destruction until one man attacked it with a kind of courage even the invaders could not understand.

ALL attempts to communicate with the spaceship failed. It caused riots over Germany, and subsequent attacks on it by U.N. jet planes had no discernible effect.

It hovered over the Bavarian forest and Austria, then appeared over Siberia and after that Communist China. The first person to see it when it appeared in the United States said that it looked just like a big insect with legs all around its rim. The spaceship was referred to after that as the Bug.

In the U. S. it concentrated its attention on state prisons, cemeteries, and large city hospitals, and finally settled in a swamp near the Gulf. There was much conflict as to how to treat the Bug. Any communication seemed impossible. Whatever was inside remained an uneasy mystery. Its purpose was even more anxiety-provoking.

It landed during the night only a hundred yards from the Federal prison located down south.

Over a thousand convicted murderers awaiting the gas chamber or serving life sentences rioted the night the Bug came down. They mutilated and killed the prison guards and blew up the prison. Federal troops sent in never came out, and at a point five miles from the Bug, communication was cut off. More troops and several tanks went in. As they passed the five-mile mark, communication stopped, and none of the troops ever came out alive. Planes flying over at less than thirty thousand feet crashed and were never heard from again.

Important people had been trapped in the quarantine zone. More important people went in there before it was prohibited. But even then, de-

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The yard became a slaughter pen as madness seized the prisoners.

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spite guards posted around the zone, people sneaked in and never came out.

The Bug was held responsible. And because no one knew anything at all about the Bug, only the worst was assumed. The Bug obviously exercised hypnotic control over anything inside the five-mile zone.

The Pentagon was under pressure. If it sent in more troops they would simply be taken over by the Bug, turned against anyone else sent in. Anything less than an atomic bomb had proven ineffectual against the Bug, and no one knew if even an atomic bomb would phase it. One thing was certain. An atomic bomb would kill everyone in the zone, and force an evacuation of a large area of the U. S., and threaten others with the dangers of radiation poisoning. Even more disturbing was the question: *"What is the Bug's power of retaliation?"*

More pressure was applied to the government. Action had to be taken. Voices were raised against all-out destructive action against the Bug. These were mostly the voices of scientists and humanitarians. They were largely ignored.

But only one man really beat the drum for atomic-bombing the Bug. He was a four-star general named Walter "Bulldog" Haines, a powerful voice and a close friend of the President. Bulldog Haines voiced the majority opinion that the Bug intended to take over the U. S., if not by direct assault, then by an insidious spreading hypnotic control. "We have to get the Bug before the Bug gets us," Haines said. "Before the Bug takes everyone over and turns the entire population into mindless zombies. Completely subservient to it."

But as a respectful gesture to the double-domes, for whom Haines had publicly displayed contempt, a scientific team of experts was sent to Lakeville, a small town only fifteen miles from the Bug, and given fourteen days—not a minute more—to come up with definite facts concerning the nature and intentions of the Bug.

"And then," said Bulldog Haines during a press conference, "I'm going in there and blow that Bug to hell."

The Commission of experts was helpless. They couldn't get into the zone to pick up any data because they would never come out.

On the thirteenth day the

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Commission knew it had failed.

And Bulldog Haines was ready to move in.

In one of the musty damp little offices in the Lakeville County Courthouse that had been given over to the Commission, Professor Lloyd Lewis suddenly stopped pushing papers into his worn brief case and started to swear.

He was a mild, rather frail man of forty-seven, whose hair was thinning, and anyone who knew him would have been shocked to see him even lose his temper, let alone swear it away with such fluency. No one heard him. Most of the other members of the Commission had already left Lakeville.

The afternoon was gray, drizzling and hot. Lewis swore for ten minutes, then cleaned his glasses, wiped his face with a soggy handkerchief, grabbed up the brief case and slammed out of the office.

He ran into Tomkins, an AP reporter who annoyed Lewis. Tomkins was grinning while slapping a folded newspaper against his thigh.

"And the devil with you too," Lewis said. "You and all the rest of your unprincipled tribe!"

More time, more time, that was all they had needed. But Lewis knew what really troubled him so much. A really dedicated scientist would have gone into that zone even with the odds all against his ever coming out. Knowledge for its own sake. Any scientist worth his salt would have done it. But he hadn't done it and none of the others had either. Traditional scientific curiosity killed by the obsessive hunger for security.

"You too," Lewis shouted at Tomkins, although his temper was ebbing away. "You're just as gutless as the rest of us. Printing lies as truth and rumor as fact, and never trying to find out the truth."

"What good is news," Tomkins asked, "if you can't get it out?"

"Then why print all this damn nonsense?"

"That's all there is. Listen, you still think the Bug's just a lonely, space-faring stranger yearning for love and affection?"

"I never said that! I said that we don't know anything about the Bug. Good God, that's a *space*ship out there."

"It's also a flytrap for anyone going in there."

"But we don't know it's motivations! What if that five-mile zone's purely for its own

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protection? It's alien in a strange world. It may not have any idea who or what we are. It may be curious. It may be friendly, or neutral. It may not be able to leave this planet even if it wants to. Maybe that five-mile zone's set up for its own protection until it can figure things out. We attacked it. It's never attacked us. Only someone going inside that zone is affected, and we don't know how. Until we know something, why assume the worst and let some frustrated bottlehead like Haines destroy the only spaceship we may ever have a chance to investigate?"

Lewis grabbed the newspaper out of Tomkins' hand and flipped it open.

"Nonsense, all damn horrible nonsense!"

"Could be true though," Tomkins said, grinning.

Lewis stared at the dismal headlines and news items.

An airline pilot surviving a crashlanding in San Bernardino and saying the Bug had taken over his mind forcing him to do it. The Russians claiming the Bug was an instrument of the U. S. operating outside the Security Council. Another religious cult arriving in Lakeville either to pray the Bug away or seek salvation in its nearness. A wife-murderer insisting the Bug motivated the deed. A woman seeking a divorce on the grounds that her husband was a zombie controlled by the Bug. Three teenage girls caught hitch-hiking South, saying the Bugmen were on Earth to get wives to take to their far-away planet. The president of the World Psychic Research Foundation still insisting that he was in constant communion with the Bug's occupant, ". . . a furry eggshell encasing a superbrain that is even now gaining telepathic control over all national governments."

"Stupid horrible nonsense," Lewis said.

"You have anything better, I'll send it in," Tomkins said. "I've been hoping you would, Lewis. Bulldog Haines is an A-number one danger to the national welfare. There hasn't been a war and hardly even a rumor of war for twelve years and that guy'll do damn near anything to justify being on the public payroll."

"I know that. More important is the idea of what we might find out from the Bug."

"On the other hand," Tomkins said seriously, "we can't underestimate the powers of the Bug."

Lewis stopped in Jill's

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Diner and put through a collect long-distance call to his wife in Prentiss, Missouri, where Lewis had taught social-anthropology for fifteen years and had gained a considerable reputation from the publishing of several books on the subject of cultural symbolism.

He looked out past a jukebox through the window at a mouldy iron horse in the village square, ridden by a Rebel who was raised up and frozen in eternal defiance with an upraised saber and a yell on his lips.

"People used to die with their boots on," Lewis said bitterly.

"What's that, Lloyd?" his wife said from Missouri with more than her usual concern. "Lloyd, are you all right?"

"Physically I'm managing to survive, Elsa. I'm flying home tonight—"

"But your work there isn't supposed to be finished until tomorrow night. Lloyd, you've got a touch of malaria or something?"

"No, Elsa. The jig's up here, that's all."

"You must be ill. What *is* the matter?"

"Human stupidity. And the fact that people no longer have guts."

"Guts! Lloyd, what are you talking about? Are you having intestinal trouble again? You haven't been drinking your eggnogs."

"Yes I have, my dear, faithfully." He was staring at the newspaper he had neglected to return to Tomkins. The picture in the lower left hand corner. The name. Mel Gordon.

He propped the paper up between the phone and the wall, read the item while his wife gave him careful detailed instruction on how he could survive until he returned home. She was well versed in this exercise.

Mel Gordon, one-time famous adventurer and soldier-of-fortune, during the revolutionary 70s, was in Lakeville planning a one-man assault on the Bug. The popular hero of yesterday, subject of a once best-selling biography entitled, *The Last Adventure,* had only this to say about his suicidal proposal: "The world is pretty dull these days. If I can't give the Bug anything else, I'll give it a medal for stirring up some excitement."

When asked if he thought he would bring himself back alive out of the zone, Gordon answered with a flash of his old daredevil smile, "I have

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my doubts or I wouldn't be here."

Lewis was seized by a surprising stroke of tingling excitement. He didn't remember how he said good-bye to his wife or whether he had said good-bye at all. He was dismayed by this familial negligence, and it only increased his suspicion that he had been driven by frustration and defeat into some state of aberrated despair.

Just the same, he was over in the parking lot across from the courthouse, backing the Commission station wagon into the street, and starting for a notorious roadhouse outside of Lakeville called the Clam Shack, before he started feeling guilty about his wife. Elsa had long considered Lewis to have been completely helpless except when lecturing or writing about cultural symbolism.

He had the car filled up with gas and oil at a filling station where he also found out how to reach the Clam Shack which, the news item had said, Mel Gordon was using as a base of operation.

He had always been a cautious driver with an intense fear of being turned into hamburger inside a pile of twisted metal, but now he drove recklessly down a rutted muddy bypath called Bayou Road.

I've gone off the deep end, he thought. The idea of a spaceship being blown up while a total mystery was too much to live with. I'm suffering from some sort of catathymic crisis, he decided, and then he didn't care if he was. A wild sense of rebellion took hold of him as he thought about Mel Gordon, adventurer and soldier-of-fortune.

He felt something near to panic at the thought that perhaps Mel Gordon had already gone into the zone. Lewis wiped at his perspiring face and forced himself by a labored act of will to slow down the station wagon.

Easy. Down, boy. Don't act like a kid clutching at a last-minute straw, and trying to turn an old, out-dated myth into a living miracle. Good God, even those labels—adventurer, soldier - of - fortune — seemed to be dusty, sad and dated things from a museum of old childhood fantasies, along with Dick Tracy, and Jungle Jim, and something called the French Foreign Legion.

He continued driving. And his excitement, if anything, increased. No getting around it, he knew. He identified strongly and deeply with Mel

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Gordon, the symbol. In addition to that, he had used Mel Gordon as a symbol, in various lectures. A symbol of dying individualism in a world seeking only security and herd identity. An archetype of inner-directedness motivated by a need for anxiety, conflict and danger in a society demanding tranquility —a trailblazer.

Lewis knew that he harbored an inner, fantasized self, and that a projection of it seemed to match up perfectly with Gordon the man. This ego-ideal had been with him since he was a frail kid humiliated by bullies. He knew he felt self contempt and guilt for not having the courage to go into that zone, and that he could do it vicariously by associating himself with Gordon.

So far, it was sensible and acceptable. But why the persisting conviction that Gordon had a chance of success? Gordon was only human after all, and Federal troops hadn't come out of the zone.

Keeping alive in yourself a hero-power image as an emotional crutch against feelings of physical inadequacy was one thing. But a sudden flooding belief that this image could perform some actual physical miracle in the world of reality was something else entirely.

He felt ashamed, loutishly self-conscious, almost infantile. Why, he thought, it's nothing less than some primitive savage's fearful need to believe in magic.

He continued driving however. And reached the Clam Shack in a dripping gray twilight. It was a delapidated hut sided with unpainted cypress slabs patched with driftwood and surrounded by a dripping forest of cypress, thick-trunked bougainvillea vines and mangroves, with the path approaching it heaped with oyster and clam shells. The interior was dim and smelled of stale grease and beer. Lewis felt adventurous on the inside and self-conscious on the outside as he sat down at the bar and watched a near-naked halfcaste woman singing a rather dirty song.

The throb of the generator that supplied electric power to the shack became a second exciting pulse in his ears. No one in there paid Lewis any attention. They weren't being unfriendly. They were minding their own business. They didn't care a hoot about a spaceship being only a few miles away. If a Martian walked in, they wouldn't no-

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tice it. They would tend to their own business.

Lewis asked about Gordon. Gordon wasn't there. For five dollars, an Indian kid guided Lewis to where Gordon was camped about a mile away. They drove through grass, entered a forest of jack pines where the air smelled of turpentine and the ground was matted with red needles, and entered a swamp where it was like moving into a green tunnel. The station wagon was drenched with a bright rain of dew.

Lewis walked through mud and rotting grass to where Gordon sat by a big smudge fire. As Lewis approached, Gordon stood up in an easy slouching movement, and pointed a revolver at him.

Lewis quickly identified himself and pointed out that he was friendly.

Gordon holstered his revolver and asked, "What do you want?" as though he really didn't care very much.

"I'd like to talk about your going into the zone."

"You couldn't make it, Lewie."

Lewis remembered that no one had called him Lewie since he was a kid.

"I don't mean myself. I mean about you going in."

He's about my age now, Lewis thought, admiring the fact that Gordon was brown and slim and wirily built, and had intensely black eyes full of virility. He was wearing a bush jacket with bulging pockets, khaki trousers, and boots.

"Sit down then and we'll talk," Gordon said, indicating the log he was sitting on and pushing a ramrod in and out of a Browning Automatic Rifle. Lewis knew what kind of gun it was. Once he had had a hobby of collecting guns although he had never even so much as gone hunting but once and hadn't brought down any ducks.

Gordon was not a myth, not a phony. He had been a hero during the Communist revolutions in Europe and the East, and in the wars of nationalism during the 70s. He was not an idealist. He was a free-lance soldier. He had to have crisis, danger, and he liked to kill while others were trying to kill him, and he had merely sought out socially-acceptable conditions for the satisfying of his abnormal needs.

Lewis asked when Gordon was going in.

"Waiting to see if the moon clouds up. Even if it doesn't, I'll have to shove off

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inside half an hour. If I come out it'll have to be before dawn."

Gordon had a slightly cynical mouth. After a while he asked the reason for Lewis' visit.

"Scientific curiosity. I want to know about that spaceship more than I've ever wanted to know about anything."

Gordon nodded. "You're okay, Lewie. At least you got this far."

"After Haines moves in, there won't be a chance of finding out anything."

"You boys," Gordon said, "and the big brass have bolixed up everything. Your teaming up has taken all the fun out of killing."

From deep inside the quarantine zone came the noise of scattered gunfire. Lights flickered in there, and an occasional shout or a scream.

Gordon looked that way and smiled. "There's plenty of the old-fashioned stuff in there. A real field day."

Gordon moved his fingers gently down the rifle barrel.

An odd thought impelled Lewis to ask if Gordon liked to kill.

Gordon puffed cigarette smoke at a mosquito sitting on the back of his hand. They droned around, big black ones, in a hungry swarm.

"Not for its own sake so much I guess. I like it when it's part of something bigger. Like getting into the Bug, something like that."

"But you wouldn't kill for the sake of killing?"

"I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

"I don't know." Lewis' forehead wrinkled with eery puzzlement. He glanced quickly toward the Bug. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes, then Lewis asked, "Why do you need to kill at all?"

"That could be a complicated subject."

"Are you afraid of dying? Does human life, particularly your own, mean anything to you?"

Gordon hesitated. "I don't get the point of your asking me such questions. It's funny though. I've often asked them of myself. I've gone almost batty the last few years with no wars or anything like that. I've tried hunting big game and risking my neck in one way or another. None of it was satisfying." Gordon looked away from Lewis. His voice lowered. "It's human death that's interesting. Kill or be killed. The essential setup."

Lewis knew Gordon's inner motivations even if Gordon

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didn't want to verbalize them or didn't know them himself. Gordon loved life too much but he wasn't aware of that but only of his adjustment to it. He loved life too much which meant that he hated it for betraying him with death. So he felt a defiance of life. He was like a man who needs desperately to love a woman, but who is sure he will be betrayed, so he scorns, laughs at, and hates women.

But Lewis' reasons for becoming involved in this line of speculation perplexed him. Certainly Gordon had never meant to him any such morbid preoccupation as this.

Gordon wanted to die and sought death if only to show his rationalized contempt for life. But what has all this to do, Lewis asked himself, with the Bug?

"You're going to try your best to get out aren't you?" Lewis asked.

"Of course. It means a lot to you doesn't it?"

"It means an awfully lot, Gordon."

"I don't care much about the spaceship, Lewie. Just the same I'll do my best to find out something for you and get back out with it."

A peculiar expression moved about over Gordon's face. It was a hard face, but the shadows from the smudge fire gave it a strangely fluid look. "Why do you care, Lewie? What if the ship knows so much? Will it really change anything? You want to live forever?"

You do, Lewis thought. "That's my incentive, Gordon. Keep looking, digging underneath the way things appear. Something may be turned up that *will* change the way things are."

Gordon looked up at the mist beginning to thicken over the rising moon. He slid the rifle into a canvas boot and put it down on a strip of dry green tarp.

"What can the spaceship tell us, Lewie, that can make sense out of a stupid universe? We've looked out there far enough to know the answer. It's all burning up and dribbling away. Life forms dying. Planets freezing or burning up. Suns exploding, and the whole works running down like an old clock."

"That seems to be the law," Lewis said. "But maybe man could change it, for himself anyway. Maybe whatever is inside that ship has found at least some of the answer."

Gordon tossed Lewis a brown bottle. "Repellent, better use it."

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Lewis unscrewed the lid, doused the foul-smelling stuff over his hands, wrists, and face. Gordon took several hand grenades out of the BOAC bag and examined them carefully, then placed them in a neat row on the tarp.

"You'll get older just the same, Lewie, and they'll bury you."

"You feel any confidence that you'll come out of there alive?" Lewis asked.

"Those boys in there are amateurs at this business. Petty gangsters and one-time psycho killers. I can handle them. If they're really influenced by the Bug, that'll make it even easier. I've been up against the authoritarian dumbies before. You worry about the unpredictable things."

"What about the Bug's influence on you?"

Gordon was hooking a number of grenades to the pocket flaps of his bush jacket. "Bug or no Bug, Lewie, a brain's a brain—and nothing is going to get its hooks into mine."

Lewis suddenly remembered that reference in *The Last Adventure* to Gordon's having been held captive in a Communist prison camp for over a year. Out of fifty some prisoners, only Gordon had proven impervious to all their brainwashing techniques.

His seemingly irrational conviction that Gordon might succeed here was not so irrational after all. Military doctors had long ago admitted that for all practical purposes they had to consider every soldier vulnerable to brainwashing. There were a few freakish exceptions, but so rare as to be not worth including in the statistics.

Gordon was a freak, individually and socially. A man detached and obsessed with maintaining his own autonomy. That was Gordon's character. Other human beings, fate, none of these things must influence him. He had to be his own master. And when he died, he wanted to manage it himself.

If there were a few people capable of resisting the so-called hypnotic influence of the Bug, Gordon was certainly one of them.

"How are you going in?" Lewis asked.

Gordon had a flat-bottomed boat he was going to pole in through the channel. The channel flowed within a quarter of a mile of the Bug. He intended to come out the way he was going in.

He hung a number of

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grenades about his neck on a wire. He cradled the automatic rifle in his left hand and extended his right to Lewis.

Lewis shook hands with Gordon. "Good luck," he said, not knowing anything else to say.

Gordon chuckled. "What the hell does that word luck mean? Anyway, why don't you wait here for me, Lewie? If I'm not back out by dawn, I'll be floating out later in a condition that won't do you any good. Then you'll have your exclusive."

"I'll wait," Lewis said.

"Keep the repellent. Mosquitoes are funny. A few of them are just irritating. But enough of them can kill you. I saw a man bitten to death by these babies once."

Gordon started to walk into the shadows, then turned. "If the Bug is an envoy from Paradise, Lewie, you'll be the first to know—after me."

For a few minutes, Lewis looked at the dark wall through which Gordon had walked. He heard nothing, but he knew Gordon had gone away down the channel.

He sat down on the log near the smudge fire and rubbed more repellent on his skin. A big alligator roared nearby. He heard a few gunshots from inside the quarantine zone. Traffic lights blinked off and on from the highway a mile away.

He hunched down to what he knew was the beginning of the longest night of his life. And what, for Gordon, would probably be the final night.

He remembered, oddly, the lines of a poem his daughter had written in an English class last year. Something about, ". . . transparent dreams that bade him sleep. And then the Siren's daughter received him as the sea receives a stream."

Anyone could, if they chose, identify with Gordon. The sweet young girl sophomore in college brooding over Werther and Schopenhauer. A murderer in death row. Everyone from the priest to the plumber who had ever feared death and secretly wanted to commit homicide, infanticide, genocide.

His persisting line of thought frightened Lewis. He looked up quickly at the moon seeming cold through the mist. The shadows seemed strangely alive and brooding all around, and he tossed a handful of brush on the dying flames and he watched them feed thirstily a while before again beginning to die.

Lewis lived on the other end

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of the scale from Gordon—an optimist by nature, accepting man's fate. He could honestly say that never before could he remember this sickening wrench of morbidity, this flat bitter taste of futility. The flame dying. The smell of organic life rotting in the muck under his feet.

He jerked around with a feeling that the movement had not been voluntary and stared toward the darkness of the quarantine zone.

He stood up. He shivered as he seemed to feel something tendrilly and cold in his head, a brushing and whispering moving about and through him as effortlessly as streaking atoms.

He rubbed at his eyes then sat back down on the log and stared into the fire. There was an unpleasantly crawling sensation, which was also unbelievable, of being probed.

Again he looked fixedly toward the direction of the Bug . . .

Thanatos.

How is instinct in human beings connected with the compulsion to repetition? There is a characteristic of instinct, perhaps of all organic life, not hitherto clearly recognized.

An instinct would be a tendency innate in living organic matter impelling it toward the reinstatement of an earlier condition, one which it had to abandon under the influence of external disturbing forces—a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the manifestation of inertia in organic life.

There would be a conservative, regressive tendency in living things. This regressive tendency may be expressed by saying the goal of all life is death.

The death-instinct is characteristic of all living matter.

In all living matter there is a tendency to return to its original and primeval, inorganic state.

There are two fundamentally different kinds of instincts — the life-instinct, Eros, and the aggressive instincts whose aim is destruction, Thanatos. The association and opposition of these two forces create the phenomena of life. These two kinds of instincts are inherent in every particle of living substance. Eros and Thanatos are fused, blended, and mingled with each other.

The death-extinct expresses itself as an instinct of destruction directed against the external world and other living organisms. One must

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either divert his aggressive, destructive instincts against others or turn them against oneself . . .

Lewis' head snapped upright. His eyes blinked open. He looked at his watch. It was after midnight. Evidently he had dozed sitting up. But his dreams were less logical—dreams of stream-of-consciousness ploughing through happily forgotten pages of dreary, over-simplified Freudian orthodoxy.

Why Freud and his codified duelistic and neatly packaged instinct theories? Lewis respected Freud, a genius, a giant, a pathfinder in the development of human insight. But a lot of that material was merely the cultification of never-substantiated theory. Man was still ignorant of so much that he ought to know about himself. So much less was known about the human cell than the atom, and almost nothing about the mind.

Death and life instincts?

Why my own obsession with this subject, Lewis wondered, and why the rigid channelization always into the area of death?

He threw more brush on the coals and realized there was no fire, no coals. He sat in darkness. His surroundings whispered and seemed eerily sentient.

Maybe there was truth in the rumor. Did the Bug have the telepathic ability to probe, influence a man sitting here outside the zone?

He thought about the Bug. Its concentration of interest over slave-labor camps, the dismal sites of former concentration camps, and the liquidation of millions in furnaces, prisons, cemeteries, large hospitals, the places with grass and flowers growing where once massacres had occurred. And in the United States—why over state prisons, cemeteries, finally settling near a prison devoted exclusively to murderers?

A coincidence that the U. S. happened to have the highest score per capita of suicide and homicide in the world?

The pattern hadn't meant much of anything to Lewis until now.

He was conscious of a peculiar throbbing ache behind his eyes. The moon plunged again into black clouds. No stars were visible. The shadows thickened, became a pulsing and formidable wall. He had the sudden awful sensation of being the only man left in the world. That the world was all a swampy jun-

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gled darkness. That there was no one else anywhere and that he alone lived preserved minute by minute by a small island of precarious memory.

When he started awake the next time there was a charcoal gray light in the leaves, and it was five in the morning. He heard a squeeshing sound, and after that a crashing of brush. He ran toward the sound.

A muddy shape broke through the leaves. It stumbled ahead blindly, one arm hanging limp, dragging one leg, lurching and trying to stay on its feet.

"Lewie," it wheezed. "That you, Lewie?"

"Gordon!"

Gordon, an unrecognizable shape, fell with his face in the cold ashes of the fire. Lewis started dragging him toward the station wagon. He had a broken crushed feeling and blood ran out of his mouth.

As Lewis managed to get him into the back of the station wagon, Gordon raised and said in a broken cry, "There *is* more, Lewie. I want to live—help me live."

Gordon's dying account of his advance into the zone was clear, oddly cold and detached. Lewis, by his side all the time, felt that in some way he had been there as Gordon push-poled the heavily-laden boat along the slow channel current.

When the moon came out through thinning clouds, Gordon had stopped poling, squatted on his knees in the stern, let the flat-bottomed craft drift where the stream was so narrow that vegetation slithered over his shoulders.

The boat glided past a glade between jackstraw piles of abandoned cypress logs where the channel again widened. He checked his wrist compass. He had committed to memory every twist and turn of the main channel and the smaller channels feeding into it. He was on course.

He heard screams, shouts, dying yells. But very little gunfire now. They were low of ammunition, or maybe too dumb to use weapons. A bloated face slid down the oily current, its head smashed in, its body partly devoured by garfish and turtles. An alligator headed for what was left, threshing and rolling in the hyacinth beds.

Standing up, he began poling again. He moved through a long stretch choked with bonnets and purple water hyacinth, then rounded a bend where the ground rose a few

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feet above water. He passed between walls of cypress and pine and the boat sagged in the current, demanding powerful thrusts with the pole.

He watched the mound of dry earth semi-circled with jack pines. A man swayed from a cypress limb on the end of a rope. Beyond that was an old swamper's bleached cabin half in the shadows, its palm-thatched roof shining. The hanged man's body swayed, but there was no wind. He had just been strung up there.

Gordon patiently keened all the sounds and scents of the night. Separated the various noises—the sliding rustle of coon or possum, the faint whistling of muskrat across the pond. A gator sending its guttural grunt through the dark. Frogs drumming heavily along the slew. Then a pair of cranes struggling up frantically from the savannah grass, and the pockets of air stirred up by their long wings.

Mosquitoes clouding around him. He remained still. He made no movement even as mosquitoes settled on his hands and buried their beaks in his flesh.

He heard the other sound then—the sounds of the human animal stalking him. He took a deep exulting breath, feeling like an animal just out of hibernation. And his blood began to stir with rising warmth as from good whiskey.

"I've got it here for you, boys," he whispered. "Just what you're looking for."

A darker shadow shifted near the shack. Wet leather squished. This is the last show, Gordon thought. Make it good and make it last and make it neat.

A shape shambled into the clearing. It whined and swung its arms uncertainly as Gordon balanced the pole across the gunwales and lifted the Browning Automatic.

Other forms came charging toward the first who let out a hoarse yell of brute terror. A revolver roared, and the man stumbled to his knees in the water as the others leaped over him like ferocious wolves. The sound drew others in crashing and yelling. Knives hacked. The man screamed out of the water. And the boat wobbled, shipping some water.

The boat was necessarily overloaded, and a little water could sink it. Gordon was depending on superior fire power, and the boat was loaded with guns and ammo. Where the channel flowed within a

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quarter of a mile of the Bug, Gordon intended to cache the boat, and use it as a base. If he ran low on ammo he could return to the boat for more. If he were forced to retreat, he intended to have a heavy machine gun set up near the boat which was also loaded with grenades and a burp gun. The boat was important.

Methodically, he fired the BAR until perhaps twelve men died there on the knoll. Then he replaced the clip and poled on to where the channel narrowed again, then curved in through a choking tunnel of wild grape and flame vine.

He didn't want to think about the Bug at all until he got to it. That was his way. And if the Bug was influencing his mind in any way, Gordon was not aware of it.

It was hotter now, and like moving through warm black ink. The only sound now was the drip of condensation and the occasional rustle of a dry palm frond.

The channel narrowed, appeared to choke off in a dead end. A blare of orange flame came out of the blackness and Gordon felt the pain burning in his thigh. He sent a burst of rapid fire in there, and calmly checked his compass, knew he was still on course. He thrust hard and the boat heaved through into a large basin where black water lay like glass under the moon. He let the boat drift, and bandaged his leg from his first-aid kit. He felt no pain, no fear, no weakness, but if anything an increase of incentive.

A Chinese doctor had once told him that he possessed a form of psychonamics, an ability to desensitize his body and feel neither pain nor hunger, when pain or hunger would otherwise have been intolerable.

No Caliban, a woman had told him once while she lay with lidded eyes in his arms, no Caliban clinging desperately to the security of a familiar rock, the solidity of established facts in a little world with a fixed set of rules. No Caliban musing upon Setebos. But a man having certain basic facts, and one prime objective. Nothing else. It was a great advantage in moments of extreme crisis.

Get to the Bug. Get out. Kill or be killed, and nothing else. A man who welcomes death is invincible. He is always winning and can never lose.

He stood listening in the stern of the boat surrounded by black dripping walls. Hardly any sound now. Every

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primitive living thing in the swamp had sensed some terrifying presence and were silently waiting as they had always waited. Only the mosquitoes continued clouding around him, attracted by his sweat.

Strangely, he thought of that little escapee from some academic cloister, Lewis. He liked the frail little man, and knew why. Once he shared Lewis' searching optimism, long ago, the wide-eyed curiosity, the glamorized hope, and the searching for a way out of extinction.

He remembered vaguely being a child and looking at his dog that had just died of distemper and learning what death was. They had given him pat comforts to explain death away. He had tried to believe them. But then his heroic father lay just like the dog only in a gilted parlor sickening sweet with the smell of dead roses.

Gordon had known then. Life was not even a tragedy. It was a dirty joke. It was a cheating woman. It promised you everything, even let you taste, and then took everything away . . .

He saw them in the grass only ten feet away. Shadows that were watching him with shining brutal eyes and the glitter of steel knives. Gordon laughed aloud as they shuffled into the mud, then the water, moving awkwardly like giant dirty moths bursting mud cocoons. Gordon cradled the BAR in his left arm, drew his .45 Colt. The first one dropped. The second came on, hip-deep and faltering, but lunging ahead. The water might have helped him up, but two .45 slugs should have knocked him under. Gordon pumped in two more shots, but the apparition gave out a sound like paper rattling and floundering for the gunwale.

Gordon shoved him in the belly with the pole, held the thing away until it sank down and rolled heavily in the water like a log. But it would not release its death grip on the pole. Gordon had to hack the puffed fingers free with his fishknife. Several more shapes blundered down to the water. Gordon tossed a grenade and crawled back into the boat. Lights bobbed toward him.

He used up two more clips until all movement stopped in the willows. Then he poled on carefully, steadily and calmly as before. Most of these guys had been killers before the Bug put in an appearance. But whatever they had been before, they were even less

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now, less human, and much less capable of survival. It seemed thoroughly convincing evidence that the Bug was influencing them in some way. The Bug hadn't turned them into killers. They were already killers, most of them were at least. The Bug had perhaps taken something away.

That wasn't important to Gordon. He kept wondering why he remained untouched by any influence from the Bug. He looked in the Bug's direction. He felt it then. Something, a sensation that he knew wasn't his own. This is it, he thought. Now it's beginning.

It was a difficult sensation to define. It seemed to be vague and exploratory, a wary approaching of something much bigger. It seemed to be the beginning of some kind of fear.

That was how Gordon decided the feeling wasn't his, but the Bug's. Gordon knew that he was incapable of fear. Was the Bug afraid? Seemed unlikely. Was the Bug attempting to inject him with fear? That seemed more likely.

He hated fear. He heard himself laugh loud. "Here I come, Bug," he said.

Mosquitoes struck against him like tiny bullets. He felt the slick blood as he burst the tiny insects against his muddy skin. He poled through curtains of moss, between wild trees hung with knobby lemons as big as footballs and studded with inch-long thorns. He angled into the mud, into the grass among a dense froth of flame vines and cobwebs. Now the Bug was less than a quarter of a mile away.

He concealed the boat with vines and leaves, and he set up the heavy machine gun facing toward the Bug and camouflaged it. Then he filled up two map cases with grenades and ammo, and a satchel of TNT. He started along the path that had been used by prisoners going to and from the sawmill. The path curved within fifty yards of the Bug.

He walked through jungled splotches of darkness, and worked his way around lakes of moonlight. He ran into bunches of what had once been men, and encountered a lot of opposition between the channel and the Bug.

The pressing, clouding presence of the Bug became a terrible weight. A sickening weakness seemed to filter through him and he kept pushing ahead as though into a

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powerful wind. Only there was no wind, not even a faint breeze.

He allowed himself to realize that he had lost a lot of blood, that he was badly wounded, in several places now; he didn't stop to investigate how seriously wounded he really was.

He broke through the brush and fell on his knees by a broken, dried cypress-pole fence. He saw fifty yards of earth burned bare and shining white in the moonlight. And in the center of this burned circle, like the filamented pupil of a giant eye, was the Bug.

Nothing moved there. A gust of wind seemed to suck at his face but there was no wind. He felt a whispering but there was no sound. There was only a dead silence.

The Bug shone with a dull luster, and it seemed much bigger there on the ground, a high, black-shelled mound surrounded by metal, crane-like legs.

He wiped at his face and struggled to get up from his knees. The naked circle, the wall of trees, black, all around, the moonlight flooding in through this frozen stillness. He felt naked, open, vulnerable as a flood-lighted thief.

He struggled instinctively like an animal under a net, and this blind struggle of sheer will threw him upward and through the broken fence.

His throat felt dry and there was a painful tension in his chest as he started walking toward the Bug, jerkily, his body rigid as though struggling with some invisible opponent down an endless flight of stairs.

Fear pulsed in the air, and something more than fear. A loathsome panicky feeling that clawed at his shoulder blades and crawled along his back with a million prickly feet stabbing at him.

His feet dragged and he knew he was half way across that now indefinite and shifting shimmering pool of moonlight, but his limbs were twitching, and sweat stung in his eyes. His feet were faltering.

He wasn't afraid. The Bug was afraid. The Bug was terrified and throwing waves of defensive resistance that buffeted and bored through his head like a gouging horn.

Resisting, yet oddly inviting. That was there too, something Gordon felt but could hardly define. A repellent fascination. It was, Gordon thought, the horrified fascination with which the timid

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are drawn to the sight of blood.

He forced his legs ahead sliding inch by inch, hating his weakness that was even beginning to threaten failure. His goal was the Bug, the Bug and back out again. He swore at his heart beginning to grind painfully under his breastbone, at the sweat itching in his bleeding and swollen face, at the pain hammering consciously now at his entrails, at the moonlight beginning to lance like splinters into the tender flesh of his eyeballs, dancing about the base of his brain in reddened choleric circles.

He fought against dizziness as he raised his rifle to his shoulder, cursing his hands that now had the spongy powerless sensation of dough. He concentrated on his finger, curling it, forcing it slowly back.

His face darkened, his mouth pressed thin by the powerful clamp of his jaw.

The clattering of gunfire bursting from him was like a vast release, the bursting of an abscess. He emptied the clip, heard the bullets spanging harmlessly and whining away into the swamp. He hurled grenade after grenade, yelling and laughing, stumbling forward, watching the explosions burst like mosquitoes attacking a tank.

A wave of twitching fear engulfed him. The Bug was reacting to his desire, his intention, rather than any physical effectiveness.

He felt the word ballooning up, blossoming out from his skull, forming a huge whirling blot, blasting into the Bug.

"Kill. Kill," he thought. *"Kill."*

A shivering cry answered, voiceless, throbbed in his head, and there was a crumbling sensation around him, a bursting and a giving-way, a falling back, a loathsomely fascinated surrender, the mental picture forming of a woman sinking backward in the muddy bed of hatefully wanted rape . . .

Gordon plunged forward senselessly on his face and lay in dead silence, a thin black splinter lying motionless on a surface of moonlight.

But his consciousness flowed on and the Bug received him, and it was like a stream flowing into a lake.

Gordon learned a great deal about the Bug. The Bug discovered in Gordon the essence of the thing it had found and had to identify. It did not really want to know, but it had to know.

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And after it knew, it regurgitated Gordon's consciousness in sickened spasms.

The dark human splinter shivered, twisted around, began working its way back toward the channel. Gordon still had to get back out and he felt a passionate rage at the pain, heard himself coughing blood over his fingertips. He kept telling himself it was someone else's blood and he was surprised at how hot it felt against his hand.

He had to get out. He needed help. He didn't want to die. *He didn't have to die. Lewie had been right—the Bug knew—.*

Gordon had talked right up to the moment that he died in a fit of intense protest. Lewis was by his side all the way, taking notes and with a tape recorder preserving everything Gordon said.

Lewis took the recorder to his hotel room, edited it, and wrote up a report. Tomkins waited for the report, and Haines waited for a few more hours to pass so he could, "Go in there and blow that Bug to hell."

"The Bug," Lewis wrote, "is apparently immortal. It has no memory of ever having been born or ever having been young. It remembers only travelling through innumerable Galaxies, driven by curiosity and the desire to acquire knowledge.

"It has encountered many forms of intelligence on many inhabited planets and from each of these planets it learned something new. It acquired so much knowledge that anything new became difficult to find, and it seemed to have absorbed everything there was to be known.

"Then it found us. And it found something new. Something utterly unique in the Universe.

"It found death.

"Not only did it find death, but it finds a highly intelligent form of life that has rationalized death, institutionalized death, and murders itself . . ."

Tomkins finished reading Lewis' report and then sat looking out of the hotel window into the darkness. Lewis lay on the bed near the window with his hand over his eyes.

Tomkins fumbled a cigarette out of soggy pack but didn't light it.

"Well, I've got a story," he said. "But who would believe it? For some reason, I don't want to believe it. I mean—Good God—are we the only

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living things in the Universe that die?"

"The Bug had seen thousands of worlds and intelligent forms of life. None of them die," Lewis said.

"But *why?* Why only us?"

Lewis took his hand away from his eyes and stared at the ceiling. "Children don't know what death is. They have to learn. Primitive illiterate people, they don't believe in death either. They think any kind of death is murder, that no one dies from natural causes. They believe that the cause of death is always some other person, something outside. They believe that if there were only good men in the world there would never be any sickness or death."

The house phone rang and Lewis picked up the receiver. He listened a moment and then hung up and looked out the window and up at the sky.

"The Bug just left," he said. Tomkins ran over to the window and looked out, but the sky was overcast. Anyway, they both knew there would have been nothing to see.

"It must have reacted like a child first coming into contact with the idea of death," Lewis said. "The feel of death—it comes into conflict with the idea of self. The first reaction is fear. Then the anxiety. The Bug had to get out. It's learned something new all right, but it should have learned something else."

"What?" Tomkins asked.

"How to live with the human touch. It may be out there now wondering if it's really immortal, trying to live with the idea of death. But it's alone and the knowledge may be intolerable."

"Maybe it did learn how to live with death," Tomkins whispered. "It learned from Gordon and from a thousand murderers, and from all of us if it looked deep enough."

"Murder," Lewis said.

Tomkins nodded.

"So then we can start wondering when the Bug will be coming back."

THE END

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Joan was a reasonable wife, but losing Johnny to the sultry blonde every

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night was a little too much.

DRUMBEAT

By ADAM CHASE

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

Johnny was a drummer. He practiced at home in the parlor. This sent his wife to a psychiatrist. But not because of the racket. She wanted the lowdown on the beautiful blonde who appeared every time Johnny picked up the sticks.

"I BEG your pardon?" said the psychiatrist.

"I said, my husband's incubus looks like Brigitte Bardotte. Well, not exactly," Mrs. Thomas considered. "Sort of like a cross between Brigitte Bardotte and Marilyn Monroe."

The psychiatrist said, "I *beg* your pardon?" again, a little more forcefully.

Mrs. Thomas shrugged. "Well, you asked me what the trouble was, and I told you. We can't afford any long treatment. You see, my husband is a school teacher and even though he earns a little extra money as a drummer on

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weekends, we still just manage to make ends meet."

"No, no, my dear Mrs. Thomas. It isn't that. We'll get to that later. What startled me is the fact that your husband has these—uh, fantasies, and *you* are able to describe them."

Mrs. Thomas shrugged and answered ingenuously, "Oh, that's because I see her too."

"You see her?"

"Of course. Brigitte Bardotte and Marilyn Monroe. She's like a cross between them. I've seen her just dozens of times."

"You are quite sure," asked the psychiatrist patronizingly, "it is your *husband* who has these fantasies?"

"Only on Friday nights, doctor. That's when he practices his drums and that's when she appears."

"And he sees her too?"

"No. *I* see her too. He saw her first."

"Uh—what does she do?"

"Dances on his drum. His base drum. Then takes him away with her."

"Away? That is, you see them go away together?"

"Oh, I don't really *see* them go away together."

"Then how—"

"She takes his hand. Then they disappear."

The psychiatrist mopped his brow. "Just where do they —uh, go?"

Mrs. Thomas frowned. "I wish I knew. Johnny won't tell me. When he returns he returns tired and happy and the girl, a blonde in green tights, is no longer with him."

The psychiatrist lit his pipe. "What you tell me is most unusual. Most unusual. For two people to have the same hallucination at the same time. . . You wish me, of course, to exorcise this demon?" Here the psychiatrist smiled, but Mrs. Thomas just looked at him. "To relieve your husband and yourself of this hallucination?"

Mrs. Thomas shook her head. "Why, no, doctor, I don't. I just want to find out where they go, that's all. If you saw the look on my husband's face when he comes back . . . Well, I just want to know where she takes him."

When Mrs. Thomas returned home, it being Friday night, Johnny was taking the canvas covers off his drums.

"Hello, hon," Johnny said.

Joan Thomas gave him a kiss. "Lot of homework?"

"A few sets of papers to mark. Plenty of time for the drums, though."

"Oh, you have an engagement this weekend?"

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"Well, no, not exactly. I meant to practice."

"The girl?"

"Well, yes. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, I guess. Only —"

"You'd like to come along? I wish you could, Joan. Sometimes at night with her I miss you."

"John Thomas!"

"No, really. Only one incubus to a customer, she says. Besides, it's how I beat the drums. It's the only way she'll come. I'm the only one who can do it, she says."

"If you can't take me, at least tell me. Where do you go?"

"I'm not allowed," said Johnny Thomas firmly.

Joan bit her lip and watched him set the drums up. After that they ate dinner, then Joan told her husband she'd been to see a psychiatrist. Johnny got angry.

"Why'd you go and do a crazy thing like that?"

Joan merely shrugged.

"Jealous?"

"Did I ever act jealous?"

"Well, I told you there wasn't a thing between us."

"I guess it's the way you come back at night, looking so happy and—tired."

"I thought you said you weren't jealous."

"Maybe a little."

Johnny finished his after dinner pipe and sat down at his drums. "If you're jealous maybe it's better if you don't watch."

"No. I want to."

"Well, here goes." And Johnny began to smile.

It was the base drum that did it. From experience he knew it didn't matter what he did with the other drums, the snare, the kettle, not even the bongo drums he'd picked up at a hock shop.

Just the base drum, and only with Johnny Thomas thumping away at it, brought her.

He began to thump.

Joan watched him, a little jealously.

After a while he seemed to be in a frenzy. He didn't touch the base drum right away. He was working up to it, savoring the moment.

Boom!

With the first loud beat, Joan felt her whole body quiver.

Almost at once the incubus appeared.

That is, the surface of the drum began to vibrate independently of Johnny's striking it. Then he sat back and watched.

From the surface of the base drum came a thin roil,

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hardly more than a tendril, of green smoke.

Johnny watched, rapt. Joan watched, her emotions in conflict.

The tendril of smoke became more substantial. Now it was a tiny blurry figure. Becoming more substantial with each second.

And growing.

It was a lovely blonde creature two feet tall.

It kept on growing.

When it was three feet tall it stopped dancing on the drum. It jumped off.

Was four feet tall. Four and a half. Five. Five feet four, which seemed to be its height. *Her* height now.

"Why, hello there!" she said. She always seemed genuinely surprised to see Johnny. "I'm always afraid you'll forget how to do it." She never looked at Joan. She seemed not to see Joan at all.

Joan bit her lip—she always did that when she was worried. She was worried now because the psychiatrist had made a suggestion she wasn't sure she liked but which she was determined to try. She hadn't told Johnny about it. She knew, of course, that his answer would have been a firm negative. Darn that psychiatrist, anyway! Why did he suggest it? It had seemed logical enough in his office, but now . . . .

"Come on," the incubus urged.

Johnny didn't need any urging. He took her hand. Then he waved his free hand, a little embarrassedly, at Joan.

"See you tomorrow, kid," he said.

The incubus smiled at him. They began to grow smaller together. Five feet tall. Four and a half. Four.

When they were three feet tall, still holding hands, they climbed up on the big base drum, the little incubus in the green tights very lithely, helping Johnny who was somewhat more awkward and was growing smaller with her all the time.

Both two feet tall, on the drum.

Then they became hazy. Like smoke.

The smoke drifted into the drum. It — and they — were gone.

Joan stood looking at the base drum. She smoked a cigarette nervously. The psychiatrist had suggested:

"Very well, it is a dual hallucination. Face it, Mrs. Thomas. An hallucination. Not real. You are both imagin-

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ing it. My suggestion is, destroy it."

"Destroy it?" Joan had asked.

"Certainly. Destroy the drum if it is the only thing which summons this—uh, incubus. Is that your husband's word for her, by the way?"

"Incubus? That's an evil demon. *He* wouldn't call her an evil demon, not on your life. Like Brigitte Bardotte and —"

"Yes, to be sure. My suggestion is, destroy the drum."

Now, in their apartment, Joan finished her cigarette. She stood for a long time in front of the drum. It looked like—and as far as she knew, was—quite an ordinary base drum.

Except for the incubus.

But maybe it was what the psychiatrist said, an hallucination they shared. Still, if it was, where had Johnny gone? Where was he right now?

"Johnny?"

No answer, of course. Joan shut her eyes and conjured up an image of the rather luscious incubus. Joan scowled.

And went and got an ax.

She spit on her hands, dusted them, hefted the ax.

Then she went to work.

Three minutes later the base drum was kindling wood.

Panting, Joan let the ax fall to the floor. It was done. She couldn't take it back and she knew Johnny would be furious when he returned, as he always did, happy and tired in the morning.

But in that she was mistaken. At least partially.

Johnny might have been happy and tired. She didn't know about that. She had no way of knowing.

For, in the morning, Johnny didn't return.

Sometimes, he was an eskimo.

He wasn't crazy about that, though. For one thing, it was too cold up there in Greenland. For another, Bebe—he called her that because she looked like Brigitte Bardotte —hated the cold more than he did. But every once in a while, just for variety, he was an eskimo. Then, with Bebe, he would bang the scratchy eskimo drums and watch the hunters do their seal dance and in the morning they would all say—not knowing who he was nor caring—he was the best drummer north of Thule. And then he would go home.

Sometimes, he was a Watusi. Ebon-skinned. Seven feet tall. Beating the war dance on a Watusi drum.

And sometimes, he was an

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Indian. That meant traveling instantaneously in time as well as space, for the braves all had buffalo robes and there were hundreds of them and they weren't on any reservation and he drummed them into a frenzy. But once, after such a drumming, Bebe told him they were going to fight a man named Custer, and he never went back to being an Indian.

He was other things in other places, too. Wherever he wanted to go, Bebe could take him — and did. But he was almost sorry when she had asked him that first night what he'd rather do than anything that he had answered he'd rather be a great drummer, drumming just everywhere, than anything. Bebe took him at his word. But, after all, weren't there things you could do besides drum?

This night, though, was special—this night being the night Joan took an ax to the drum, but Johnny didn't know that yet.

After they disappeared—which, from their point of view, meant after they had left the living room of the Thomas apartment and found themselves in a featureless expanse of greenish smoke—Bebe asked the usual question. "Where would you like to go and do your drumming tonight?"

Johnny's answer surprised her. "Do I have to drum?"

"My goodness, that's what you want, isn't it?"

"Well, for example, where do *you* live?"

"Listen, Johnny Thomas, before I answer that question, wouldn't you rather be a great drummer than just anything?"

"Sure, but—well, all work and no play . . ."

"Just what do you think genius is, anyway?"

"Genius? Why, I don't understand."

"I'll tell you. Take a man with talent. Talent and genius, now, they're two different things. A lot of people have talent, thousands and thousands, in a hundred different fields, all over the word. But genius? Take music, since you're a drummer. How many bona fide musical geniuses have there been?"

"If you mean *real* geniuses, not many, I guess. There was Bach and Mozart, and Beethoven —"

"Ludwig?" Bebe said delightedly. "He was one of my customers! I'll never forget Ludwig!"

"Er, Ludwig von Beethoven?"

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"Naturally. To get back to genius. The line that divides genius from talent is more than a line. It's an enormous chasm, Johnny. It's an abyss. And no one crosses it without help. My kind of help."

"Which consists of —"

"Which consists of developing the talent into genius the only way it can—through the kind of catch-all experience a mere mortal cannot achieve for himself."

"You mean like taking me all over the world to practice drumming?"

"Sure. That's my line of work. Why, you should have seen all the places I took Ludwig. To watch the gamelon orchestras in Bali. To watch Nero fiddle while Rome burned. Old Nero was pretty good at it, too, whatever calumny you might hear to the contrary. To watch—but you get the idea."

"And I'm going to be a drumming genius?"

"You almost are already. So are you sure you want me to take you someplace else tonight? Genius is hard to come by and —"

Johnny grinned. "If I'm going to be a genius thanks to you, I guess it can keep till next Friday. Hey, is that why you can only visit me once a week—on account of you have other budding geniuses to work with the other six nights?"

"Five nights. We get Sundays off."

"Who are you working with now?"

"Uh-uh, Johnny Thomas. That's a professional secret, because they all won't pan out. Well, where will it be tonight?"

"Where," Johnny asked again stubbornly, "do *you* live?"

"I was afraid you'd get around to that again. Most of them do, sooner or later."

"Then if most of them do, you're used to it. So take me home with you, Bebe."

"If you really want to," Bebe said reluctantly. "I hate the place."

"Why"

"You'll see why if you insist. Do you?"

"I guess I kind of do," Johnny said after a while.

Bebe sighed and snapped her fingers. Inside the world of green smoke there suddenly was a more substantial puff of smoke.

That was them.

The first thing Johnny noticed was everyone looked so sad.

The place was like a park, beautifully landscaped, well

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laid-out. The weather was a little cool but delightful. Brooks and fountains gurgled everywhere and here and there nestled in the park were little rustic cabins, tidy, neat, with smoke curling lazily from the chimneys. The sky was a beautiful blue and marble paths criss-crossed the park.

On these, strollers were out in force. They wore a great variety of clothing from all ages and all places. Here was a toga'd Roman, there a be-jewelled Saracen, there an eighteenth century French dandy.

All with their heads down, all sunk in gloom. All looking ineffably sad.

Except for Johnny. He felt quite chipper and didn't hide it. He swung along, arm in arm with Bebe, enjoying the weather, enjoying the beautiful park, enjoying the fact that unexpectedly it was a perfect early spring day instead of winter night.

But after a while the sadness kind of got him and he couldn't help asking: "Why are they all moping around so?"

"I tried to tell you," Bebe said, "but you wouldn't listen. They were all potential geniuses. They went through a course of training similar to yours—then they decided to come where their incubuses lived and —"

"You mean you're not the only one?"

"Goodness, what ever made you think that? There are just hundreds of us."

"But why are they sad?"

"Because they're stuck here in eternal spring. They can't go back. They'll spend forever here. The weather never changes and as far as you can go in any direction there's just the park."

Suddenly Johnny felt a pang of alarm. "Stuck here? Why?"

"Well, each one had a magic touchstone to genius. Like with you it's that base drum. See that fellow there?"

Johnny saw a distinguished looking man in late Victorian clothing. "What about him?"

"That's H. G. Wells. He was one of my customers. A fine writer, one of the outstanding men of his period, with a great talent. But not quite genius. And he lost his pen."

"What? I don't get it."

"Neither does Mr. Wells. That is, he doesn't know what happened to his pen, except it was somehow destroyed back in your world. Not only was it his touchstone to genius, it

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also was his gateway between the worlds. Like your drum. But it's gone now. And he can't go back."

Bebe pointed at another man who was sunk in deep gloom as he came trudging along the path. He wore frilly eighteenth century clothing and a powdered wig.

"Good morning, Haydn," Bebe said. And, in an aside to Johnny: "It's always morning here, you see. Morning is the best time for creative work."

"Morning," Haydn said gloomily, and trudged on.

"You mean," Johnny whispered, "Haydn the musician?"

"Sure. He had a fine talent. Almost, he was a genius. But then he became a hack, producing too much. And, at a crucial time, his harpsichord was destroyed in a fire. So here he is—forever."

"Forever?"

Bebe nodded. Then: "Oh, there's one of my favorite almost-geniuses!"

A big burly man in a bearskin came trudging by. He was carrying a cudgel and using it as a walking stick. He was looking down at the ground.

"That's Ungo-par, a Cro Magnon," said Bebe. "He did some splendid cave drawings but . . . well, here he is. He's our first customer. He's been here twenty-one thousand years."

Johnny watched Ungo-par go by. "Isn't there anything they can do to get back?" he asked Bebe.

"Sure there is. They have to produce a bona-fide work of genius. That's all it takes. But so far no one ever had. Of course, if their touchstones hadn't been destroyed. . . .

Johnny walked on, unaware exactly when gloom set in. All he knew was, suddenly but unobstrusively the paradoxical gloom of the spring-like park cloaked him as it did the others. At first he thought it was just a mood. He'd always been moody, hadn't he? Only this time the mood didn't go away. And he sunk deeper and deeper in it.

"I—I think I'm ready to go back now," he told Bebe. "If I've missed one of our field trips I'm sorry. It won't happen again, Bebe. I—I don't think I like it here."

"That's what they all say, sooner or later. Only, lucky for you, nothing's happened to your touchstone. Nothing's happened to your base drum, so you can get back. Are you ready?"

Johnny said he was ready. Bebe held his hand. There were no magic words or any-

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thing. Just holding hands was enough.

Usually.

But now it didn't work.

"Well?" Johnny said.

Bebe looked at him strangely. "It . . . isn't . . . working," she said.

"What are you talking about? That's impossible. My drum —"

"Wait a minute." Bebe squinched her eyes shut. Without asking, Johnny knew she was conjuring a vision, across space and time or whatever gap separated them from New York, U. S. A., of Johnny's apartment.

"Well?"

"Your touchstone," Bebe said finally. "The drum. It's been smashed to kindling!"

Johnny's knees felt weak. His vision blurred and there was a roaring in his ears. "You mean I'm — trapped here?"

"You're one of us now, Johnny."

"You mean—for keeps?"

"For keeps. I'm sorry."

Bebe had become contrite, but that changed. The next moment she was cool and business-like. "Find an empty cabin," she told Johnny. "There are plenty around. When you get there, you'll find a drum in it."

"But I —"

"Practice, Johnny. It's your only hope. If you can become a genius you're free to go. But I must warn you not to hold out any hope, because in twenty thousand years there hasn't been a single case of . . ." Her voice went on, but Johnny didn't hear the words. He wandered as in a dream through the park. Finally he found a cabin which didn't have smoke rising from the chimney, and Bebe led him inside. There was a set of drums waiting for him. He thumped them disconsolately and then sat with his head in his hands. Bebe smiled sadly, patted his head, and went outside.

Johnny was alone.

He tried everything. He drummed. He wrote music, something he'd always wanted to do. Every now and then Bebe would come and listen to the results. "Very beautiful," she'd say. "Very nice indeed. But not quite genius." It sounded as if she'd said that before. "But not quite genius. You might as well —"

"I know. Keep trying."

Changeless days passed. Weeks. Months, although it was difficult to measure time in the changeless spring morning. Johnny became very expert but, as Bebe indicated, the touch of genius was lack-

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ing. And unless he found the touch of genius, something which had never been accomplished here, he was stuck forever.

Like all the other near-geniuses.

Soon he spent some of his time trudging unhappily along the lovely paths. He began to know his neighbors. Ungo-par, the Cro-Magnon. Haydn the composer. H. G. Wells, the novelist. Others. They were friendly but listless.

Johnny drummed and drummed. His diligence surprised the others. "Well, he's been here such a short time," Ungo-par said. "He'll learn," Haydn predicted.

Gloom came. For days on end Johnny didn't play anything. He missed twentieth century Earth. He missed Joan. He missed his old life.

Why try? he told himself. All these others before me, who have been here so much longer, haven't been able to do it. Why knock yourself out?

Why? Because he wanted to get back.

But so did the others.

Was there any reason to believe he could succeed where they had failed? Was there anything which made him different?

Suddenly he knew there was. He was a mid-twentieth century man, wasn't he? And that was a distinction, wasn't it? A plan came to him and the more he thought of it the more he liked it.

Mid-twentieth century man, with his one distinction. Something that made the twentieth century unique. Books had been written about it, philosophies expounded . . .

The twentieth century's passion for organization.

On its lowest level, the assembly line.

On its highest, the parliaments and congresses of the great Western democracies.

Johnny told his plan to Ungo-par. "Don't be ridiculous," the Cro-Magnon said.

He told his plan to Haydn. "Absolutely fantastic," the composer declared promptly.

He outlined it to H. G. Wells. "Craziest thing I ever heard," the novelist told him frankly.

"Can any of you think of a better idea? Or maybe it's because you're wallowing in self-pity. Maybe you've grown to like it. Maybe you don't really want to go home."

That enraged them. "Listen," Ungo-par said. "I have an idea for a cave drawing, if only I can get back. There are these mammoths, see . . . ?"

"How dare you say that?"

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Haydn said. "I've been playing around for years with the idea of a trumpet concerto, but I just can't bring myself to write it here." He sighed. "If only I could go home . . . the bracing air and bracing trumpet music . . ."

"As for me," H. G. Wells said, "there's this science-novel I've been meaning to write, but I'll never write it here. About a man and a machine that can travel through time. I even have a title. If I ever get back I'll call it, starkly and simply, *The Time Machine*. What do you think?"

"I think you won't get back unless you try my plan. You're all afraid to try!"

Ungo-par brandished his cudgel menacingly. Johnny didn't flinch. "Well, aren't you?"

"Let's show him," Haydn said at last.

And, using Johnny's plan, they all went to work.

It took several months, working at fever pitch. Ungo-par painting, H. G. Wells writing, Johnny and Haydn doing the music. Finally, one day after they finished, Johnny found Bebe walking in the park.

"Listen," he began.

"Where have you been, Johnny Thomas? You and those cronies of yours—why, we haven't seen anyone work so hard here in ten thousand years!"

"Why, we're all ready to go back home," Johnny said matter-of-factly.

Bebe couldn't help smiling. She thought Johnny had been working too hard. But he had more to say.

"Here's the way I see it," he told her. "Each great age in the history of mankind has had its own special greatness. For example, the Renaissance, like ancient Greece, was the time of individual genius. You don't have any Athenians marooned here. You don't have any Renaissance Italians. Well, do you?"

"N-no," Bebe admitted.

"But the greatness of the twentieth century, particularly in America, is the greatness of organization. True democratic governments. The vast scientific organization that developed atomic power. The great team-working corporations. The universities. The—"

"Yes, I see what you mean. So?"

"So, I've done some organization of talent here. No geniuses, but four darned good talents. Ungo-par, who can paint the best stage settings you ever saw. H. G.

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Wells, who can and has written the book of a musical comedy. Me and Haydn, who did the music. Four good talents, Bebe — organized — become genius!"

And, with all the assembled incubi watching, they staged their musical comedy.

Ungo-par's stage-settings were magnificent. Not quite genius, but really superb. H. G. Wells' book—the idea of the play was from this unwritten-as-yet book, *The Time Machine*—was splendid. The music, written by Haydn and Johnny, was beautiful. Again, not quite genius. But it did incorporate Haydn's wonderful trumpet music and . . .

. . . And, four great talents, organized together, produced something each talent alone did not have, could not have without help.

A work of genius.

When the play was over—acted by the plentiful talent of stranded near-genius actors—the incubi gave it a standing ovation.

Clearly, everyone involved had his passport to freedom and to life again in his own time and country.

Bebe escorted Johnny home personally. "It will be as if just a single night has passed for all of you," she explained.

When they got back dawn was just breaking. She kissed Johnny goodbye. "I'll miss you," she said.

"I guess I'll miss you too."

"I have a surprise for you."

"What?"

"You'll see."

Johnny blinked. Bebe was gone.

The next few weeks, he was so busy he forgot all about Bebe's surprise. He was busy because he had decided to produce the musical comedy version of H. G. Wells' *Time Machine*, now a part of the public domain, in New York.

It was a smash success. It was hailed as the greatest musical comedy since *My Fair Lady*, and it would probably run just as long.

Johnny learned what the surprise was at the first-night celebration. His wife Joan kissed him. He'd been so busy, it was like looking at her for the first time.

She had changed, just the slightest bit.

It was something intangible, but it was there. It most certainly was.

The look in her eyes. The way she smiled.

As if Bebe had left a little of herself on earth, for Johnny, in Joan.

Which was precisely what she had done. **THE END**

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Do we live by chance or is our destiny foreordained? Do we make our own futures, or are we conforming to a pattern whatever way we twist and turn? There are strong arguments in both directions, but in either case, perhaps——

IT'S BETTER *NOT* TO KNOW

By ROG PHILLIPS

ILLUSTRATOR MARTINEZ

SUDDENLY my day was ruined and nothing could save it. And nothing did. It had started out as a particularly beautiful day, too. Probably also for a lot of other people besides myself. For some it got suddenly better, but for the rest of us—*Chih jen* affected people differently. Or he affected some people and didn't affect others. That's probably closer to the truth because he didn't affect me at all, directly.

Of course, no one knew about *Chih jen* yet or had ever heard of him. At least I'm sure no one in Harold's Club did, least of all me, as I plunked half dollar after half dollar into the insatiable maw of a one armed bandit, pulled down the handle that gave it its name, and watched the little wheels spin and stop in every combination except one that paid.

I had said, as I drove into Reno the day before on my first day of a two weeks' vacation, that I would stay only long enough to lose fifty dollars. That had been yesterday while *Chih jen* was probably crossing inside the orbit of the Moon—a conjecture with no evidence to support it since no one reported sighting any UFOs, either real or fancied. Unfortunately, that first day, I came out ahead. Ten dollars and a half ahead, to be exact. If I had lost fifty dollars as I intended, I would have been on my way bright and early, and well out of everything that happened to me.

Instead, I was exactly one hundred and ten dollars loser,

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The girl, the lemonade, and the wrecked car—
were they parts of a logical whole?

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and it was (I told myself) too late to start out toward Salt Lake City until the morning and by tomorrow morning I would be too broke to do anything but turn around and return home to San Francisco. Then the stranger who had been standing behind me for the past fifteen minutes tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Do you mind?"

"Do I mind what?" I said.

He smiled sympathetically and waved vaguely at the machine. "Just once—to change your luck?" he coaxed, and, as I hesitated, "Just once?" he pleaded. And then, to clinch his argument, "*Only* once."

Having no logical answer to his persuasiveness I nodded and stepped aside far enough to permit him to put the fifty cent piece clutched in his fingers into the coin slot and pull the handle.

While the wheels were still spinning he took off his hat, a brown fedora so new that the sweat band was spotless, and held it under the payoff chute —barely in time to catch the first of the cascade of gleaming half dollars of the bloated jackpot.

"Sorry," he said apologetically, his eyes dancing. "I'll split it with you if you want. I really didn't—"

"No thank you," I said curtly, and strode out of the gambling casino leaving the man staggering under the load of the half dollars I had lost and would have won back with one more play if he hadn't interfered.

From that moment, of course, my day was irrevocably ruined. I decided it wasn't too late in the day to start toward Salt Lake City. It was, in fact, only two in the afternoon.

Chih jen, as everyone knows now, was at the time already less than two hundred miles out on the Nevada desert, having landed his spaceship quietly at about sunrise. But as yet he had not so much as opened a porthole.

He didn't have to. And I say that quite bitterly for now I know what it means.

The service station attendant was a trimly built man in his thirties, with a clean cut somewhat handsome face with the weathered tan of a man who has spent his life on the edge of the desert.

He filled my tank, then began cleaning my windshield. He was looking like he had something on his mind. A thing like that is hard to explain. He would glance at me, then glance away. Then he would look at me as though he

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were looking beyond me into the back of the car.

It was so pronounced that I began to wonder vaguely if he might have seen a police poster lately that bore a resemblance to me. I chuckled inside at the thought. Good thing my conscience was clear. If I were a gangster on the lam or something like that I would probably think he was on to me and have to shoot him, when it was something entirely unrelated to me that bothered him.

While he checked the oil and water I built up quite a fantasy in my mind about it. A gangster shooting him but only wounding him, then trying to escape, with the highway patrol chasing him and capturing him. Then the gangster finds out the service station attendant hadn't even looked at him, but was only worried about his wife who was going to have a baby.

"That will be four dollars and eighty cents."

I jerked back to reality and blinked at him. "Huh?" I said.

He smiled. "Four eighty. I could check your tires if you'll drive over to the hose." He said it like he was sure my tires didn't need it.

"That's all right," I said. "Tires are okay." I handed him a five dollar bill.

He took his time finding the twenty cents change.

"Uh," he hesitated.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"You heading east?"

"As far as Denver," I said. "Get there tomorrow — I hope." I grinned.

"Uh," he said again.

"Yes?" I was curious by now. Something was definitely on his mind.

"How about letting me check your rear axle?" he said. He looked at me, then looked away, and, not looking at me, added, "Sounded kind of funny when you drove in, like it might be crystallized. Wouldn't do any harm for me to check it."

"How long would it take?" I asked.

"Close to an hour. Have to get the new one from the wholesale— That is, if it's crystallized . . ." He grinned uncomfortably.

On top of the lost jackpot this was too much. I lost my temper. I didn't say a word, but he could tell what I was thinking from my expression. His weathered tan took on the tint of sunburn. Then he got a stubborn look.

"All right," he said doggedly, "I'm not used to lyin'. But this is the truth. If you drive on, your left rear axle is going

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to break when you're about thirty miles out in the desert. And don't ask me how I know. I've had more trouble this morning! A man with a coil that was going to go accused me of shyster selling and drove off, and an hour later he was back with the highway patrol accusing me of jimmying his coil to make it go bad."

"Then why don't you just stick to selling gas?" I said, starting the motor.

As I drove away I could see him through the rear view mirror, standing by his gas pumps looking after me.

Suddenly the whole thing struck me as being very funny. The poor man was obviously as honest as the day is long, and he probably had orders from the boss to work this racket of convincing people they needed repairs or get fired. He was too honest to make it work.

By the time I reached the end of Motel row I had dismissed Reno from my mind—shifted my gears mentally and physically for the long afternoon and night of driving ahead of me before I reached Salt Lake City.

It was hot. I had picked the hottest time of the day to start out. The air coming in the partly opened window felt as though it came out of a furnace. If the axle *were* to break I would be in for some real discomfort. I chuckled. The whole idea was absurd. What did the service station attendant think he was? A prophet? Thirty miles out in the desert! Ha!

But a thing like that could be made into a sweet racket. Plenty of people would fall for it. You wouldn't even need to get new stock, just clean up the perfectly good parts you replaced on a car and put them in the cartons and sell them to the next sucker as new parts. A hundred percent profit for a hundred percent prophet. Fake prophet, that is.

I threw back my head and laughed out loud—and everything seemed to happen at once.

When I recovered enough to shut off the racing motor and get out of the car, I saw the left rear corner of the car resting on a ruined brake drum, and the left rear wheel, with about two feet of axle in it, was on the other side of the highway.

No cars were in sight. The perfectly straight and level highway stretched to the horizon in each direction, wavering like molten lava in the heat waves.

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Overhead, old man Sol smirked behind his fiery mask. He had me, and he knew it.

"Damn that service station guy," I said aloud. "Why didn't he do a better job of convincing me!" It was a natural reaction. I smiled wryly, knowing it's illogic.

Not a breath of air was stirring. I tried sitting in the car out of the sun, and my clothes quickly became soaked with perspiration. I tried standing outside. My clothes dried quickly but the sun bored into my brain until it was sizzling like a steak in a broiler and I was dizzy. Dizzy, I tried to hold onto the side of the car, and it was like touching a hot stove. I got back inside the car and it was hotter than it was outside.

An hour had gone by. The radiator temperature gauge on the dashboard pointed to one forty and I knew that the water in the radiator had had plenty of time to cool down to the temperature of the surrounding air. One hundred and forty. It didn't seem possible.

Why couldn't that service station attendant have had the courage of his convictions and sent out a wrecker to rescue me? I raved at him in my thoughts until the futility of it made me stop.

I debated walking down the highway in one direction or the other. Going back towards Reno, I could walk the rest of the day without coming to anything. What was in the other direction? Maybe a hundred miles of nothing. Maybe just beyond the horizon was a filling station. Two or three miles, maybe.

But could I remain rational for that distance? The danger was, I fully recognized, that with the sun frying my brain I might leave the highway and wander out into the desert where no one could find me.

Anyway, what would I gain by walking? The same car that would pick me up here would pick me up out there. So why leave the car? Sooner or later someone would come along . . .

A transcontinental highway, and it might as well have been on Mars!

I felt completely abandoned. Deserted. And if I had known that *Chih jen*, a hundred and twenty miles away across the desert wastelands, was already aware of me as an individual, I would probably have felt just as abandoned. I would probably have said, "So what?"

I had peered into the wavering heat waves of the highway looking for an approaching

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car so long that the wavering had become a part of me. When I held my hand up and looked at it, it wavered the same way.

Still, I kept trying to penetrate into the molten distance, torturing my eyes needlessly. Any car that came would come fast. I would be able to hear it coming seconds after I saw it.

I closed my eyes to rest them. I couldn't stand the wild distortions. After a moment I opened them again.

Through the shimmering haze something was coming. A car.

I couldn't be sure. One second it would seem to be there, then I couldn't see it. If it was a car it must be going awfully slow. Maybe it had stopped. That would be a joke. Another car, less than a mile away.

Suddenly it emerged from the boiling and was hurtling past me—so suddenly I had no time to get out of the car.

It was past me. Then its tires were screeching. It was stopping! It was backing up.

It was a four year old Plymouth coupe. There was only one person in it. A girl. I had gotten out of my car and was standing there. She backed the car even with me and stopped.

"You look ready to keel over," she said cheerfully.

"Who, me?" I croaked, and keeled over.

I didn't *know* I keeled over. I merely deduced it some time later when I recovered consciousness and found myself inside the coupe with someone wiping my face with a cold wet cloth.

Cool moisture tricked onto my lips. I opened my lips and tasted it. It was lemonade.

"A little too sweet," I said, "But I'll have some."

She took the wet cloth away. I blinked at her, my eyelids sticky with lemonade. She wasn't beautiful but very close to it. Her large blue eyes were a shade too far apart, and though she couldn't be more than twenty-two or -three there were already good humor wrinkles around her eyes. Her nose and cheeks had faint freckles under the golden tan. She was smiling, revealing even white teeth—a very pretty sight indeed.

I answered her smile with a forced grin and tried to sit up.

Suddenly she was looking at me differently. Curious, sort of frightened, wondering, questioning — impossible to really describe.

"I don't even know your

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name!" she said in an amazed whisper.

"Lemonade," I croaked.

"It's funny," she said, absently pouring some lemonade from the quart thermos into a red plastic cup. "I know we are going to be married and remain together the rest of your life, but I don't know your name . . ."

I grabbed the cup from her unresisting fingers and lifted it to my lips. I was shaking so much I had difficulty with it, and a lot of the cold liquid spilled down my chin and neck, and inside my shirt. But enough of it went where it was intended to bring soothing cooling sweet cleanness to my mouth and throat.

And I should have been refreshed, sighing with relief and satisfaction. Instead, my thoughts were swirling with a mixture of unpleasant reactions. This girl had undoubtedly saved my life and I should be grateful, at least. But how many girls had taken one look at me and decided they were going to marry me? Too many. Too many girls are like that. It's like they look at a hat on a counter and their eyes light up and they say, "This is for me!" Automatically I had always shied away from the type.

Even as I classified her this way the other thoughts were nagging at me. The man who had swiped my jackpot, the guy who had been so sure my axle would break out in the desert, and now this girl who was so sure she was going to marry me.

Something else tugged at my thoughts. Something she had said. Something unpleasant. ". . . the rest of your life." As though in addition to knowing she was going to marry me she knew I would die before she did.

A real psycho, out shopping for a husband and already dreaming of the insurance and being a rich widow.

The thought rang hollow. I had a feeling she had never chased after a man in her life and wasn't conscious of chasing after me.

I covered my face with my hands, more to conceal my feelings than anything else, and said, "Thanks for saving my life. Can we get somewhere out of this sun, and where I can send a wrecker to get my car?"

There were several long seconds of silence, then, "Of course," she said, her voice quiet and rich.

The car began moving. I took my hands away from my face. She was alternately

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watching the road and my face, a smile going on and off as though she were doing a bad job of repressing it.

"Will you tell me your name!" she said finally in good natured frustration.

"No," I said.

I knew I was sulking, and I hated it. I scowled at the passing sagebrush.

Finally she broke the silence. "I don't like your attitude," she said.

"That's strange," I said stiffly. "*I* like it. In fact, I like it fine!"

"Agh!" she said in exasperation. "Why do you have to ruin it? Here we are, in the most beautiful, the finest moment of our whole lives—and you have to spoil it!"

"Aren't you being a bit irrational?" I said with clipped preciseness, still staring at the blur of sagebrush passing.

When she hadn't answered after a moment, I stole a look at her. She was staring straight ahead, her eyes wide with surprise, her mouth partly open. As I watched, the surprise changed to puzzled bewilderment. She darted a glance at me. When she saw me looking at her, fright and embarrassment replaced the bewilderment.

I continued watching her. After a moment she said, "I'm sorry. I guess *I* ruined everything, didn't I."

"You certainly did," I said bitterly, and immediately felt like a criminal.

Resenting her making me feel like a criminal, I glared at the passing blur of sagebrush again.

When she didn't say anything, the passing sagebrush became clouded by a vision of her sitting there, suffering, tears clouding her eyes so she couldn't see the road.

"Look," I finally blurted. "It isn't just you."

At least a mile went past. She didn't say anything.

"You're just the end of a particularly bad day," I said comfortingly. Realizing too late how that must sound I added hastily, "It isn't your fault. You can't help it."

A brooding silence settled. It became so absolute that when an army jet zoomed low over us I repressed the natural conversational gambit it offered.

After a while she said, "Wasn't that an *army* jet?" She said it in a small, suffering voice filled with courage.

Damn her, I ground my teeth in my thoughts, *now it's back in my lap and I have to say something or be sulking again!*

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"I think so," I said coldly, and I thought, *Ha!* Then, against my will, I said, "First there was the guy that swiped my jackpot at Harold's Club. On a fifty cent machine, too!"

She turned her head and looked at me with tear brightened sympathetic eyes. Eyes that were too wide apart, like Arabian horses. Thorobred.

I spread my arms vaguely in a gesture of disbelieving wonder.

"He just tapped me on the shoulder," I said incredulously, "and begged my pardon. I stepped aside and he stuck a half dollar in the machine and got the jackpot. Just like that!"

I stared at the sagebrush for a minute, then glanced at her. She was frowning in thought.

"Just like he knew it was coming?" she asked cautiously.

"Exactly," I scowled.

"Did —" She studied the road some more. "Did he offer to split it with you?"

"I turned him down and walked out," I said.

Above the faint hum of the car the sound of a siren emerged into audibility, far away.

She cocked her head sideways and listened, then said gravely, "I see."

"No you don't," I said. I twisted around on the seat to face her. "Then there was the gas station man. He wanted to put a new rear axle in my car, said the one I had would break about thirty miles out into the desert."

She turned and looked at me, her eyes wide and serious.

I nodded grimly and said, "It did."

She looked back at the road. Finally she nodded, and said, "And then THERE WAS ME!" She had had to shout as the police car zoomed past us with screaming siren.

We watched the police car recede swiftly ahead of us at over a hundred miles an hour. When it was out of sight I nodded.

"Now you see," I said.

"I see," she nodded.

"So now you can understand that there isn't anything to it," I said.

"I don't see anything of the sort!" she said. "This is wonderful! This proves it!"

"Nuts!" I said, biting my lip. "To show you how much this 'proves' it, I wouldn't marry you on a stack of Bibles. I'll be damned if I'm going to be dictated to, and I don't care if your ears are sen-

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sitive or not, I'll still be damned if I'm going to be dictated to."

"Who's dictating to you?" she asked.

"YOU ARE!" I shouted as a second police car with siren going full blast darted past us as though we were standing still instead of going seventy.

We studied its dwindling shape. Half a mile ahead it darted off the highway and started across the desert, raising a cloud of dust.

"The girl *I* marry," I said grimly, "I'll make up my mind in my own way, then I'll ask her, and she'll be surprised and happy. Or maybe she'll turn me down!" I shrugged.

She slowed down and turned off the highway, following the tracks of the two police cars in the sand as they went this way and that, avoiding the sagebrush as much as possible.

"I wonder what's up ahead?" I said.

"*Chih jen*," she said. Then her eyes widened.

"Chee what?" I said.

"I—I'm not sure," she said in a wondering voice. "It just slipped out. I seemed to know it without thinking about it. Like I know we're going to be married."

We could see the two police cars when we were still half a mile away. A helicopter was settling to the desert near them, and in the cloudless gunmetal sky were various moving dots, some of which were undoubtedly more helicopters and some jet fighters, and some of which were spots before my eyes.

A coyote looked at us as we passed within a hundred yards of the weather worn boulder lookout where he stood, not moving.

As we drew nearer to the two cars and the helicopter we could see three or four men standing close together and looking toward something farther on, which we could not yet see.

"Wonder what they're looking at?" I said.

"I don't know," she said, and she was very humble.

"Well, we'll know in a few minutes," I said.

"I know now," she said.

With some surprise I saw that she was close to crying. She sniffed loudly.

"It's a space ship," she said defiantly. "It has a man in it. He's very unhappy, and he's not going to stay here." Her last five words came out as a wail, and she cried a little.

"This Chee something-or-

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other," I said gently. "Is that his name?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. I don't think so. I think he's one of the *Chih jens*."

"Whatever they are," I said dryly.

A man in the uniform of the Nevada highway patrol was running toward us, waving for us to go back.

"Keep going," I said. "He can't stop us now."

She drove up beside one of the police cars and stopped, shutting off the motor. We got out, ignoring the protests of the officer and his flushed angry face.

At our feet began a gentle downslope into a dished valley that was hardly distinguishable from the rest of the desert. In its center was the ship.

There was no mistaking it, nor the fact of its alien origin. It was a metal sphere a hundred feet across. It shimmered with a light that seemed to originate out a foot or two from its actual surface, rather than be a reflection of sunlight.

"He's *there*!" she whispered, clutching my arm.

I wasn't sure it wasn't imagination, but I could feel it too, now. I couldn't see any opening in the ship, but I would have sworn something was watching me, aware of me.

A voice erupted from one of the police cars. "Calling car one-twenty-two, calling car one-twenty-two. Report in please, report in please."

The officer that had tried to stop us went over to the car and reached in, bringing out a mike.

I blinked my eyes. I *thought* I blinked my eyes—and the metal sphere was not there anymore.

A man's voice said, "Guess that's the last of her." I turned to look at him. He and the others were peering into the sky.

I looked up quickly. Far far up was a small dot that vanished even as I found it. A spot before my eyes? I couldn't be sure.

A hand crept timidly into mine. I looked down. It was Sheila standing beside me. "He's gone, Jim," she said.

I looked at her a minute, then looked around. There were five highway patrol cars and three helicopters. How had they got here without my noticing it? And Shelia—how had she known my name when she hadn't the moment before?

I had been in the space ship!

I could remember, sudden-

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ly, with all the vividness of a dream. A real dream. Some part of me had boarded that ship for a while. Not my physical self; my footsteps, quite plain in the sand, did not go toward the places where the ship had been, but only toward the car a few feet away.

I had seen *Chih jen* and talked with him. Sheila had been there with me—and some others. How long? I looked at the sun. It was already touching the western horizon. I tried to estimate. Two hours? Three?

I closed my eyes, and I could see the scene again.

Chih jen. Asleep he would probably have looked no different than any other person I had ever met. With his mind turned on he seemed like a god, but I had known he was no god, just a man.

A man impossible to describe or for anyone to picture who had not seen him. Of course, he was not a terrestrial. What he was—even now I shivered at the thought.

I felt sorry for him. Sorrier than I had felt for anyone. I wanted to cry for him. I squeezed my eyes tight and clenched my fists, and Sheila winced in pain as I unintentionally hurt her hand.

Chih jen. The perfect man.

How can I describe him? Sheila was right, he had no name. *Chih jen* was a title—a name of species, perhaps—but not a name. He had been curious about our names, our need for them, and hadn't seemed to understand about it. That was when I had learned Sheila's name and she had learned mine.

But that wasn't what made me want to cry for him. How can I describe it? He had passed beyond being human—or perhaps never reached it. He was like a mountain stream or a vast ocean, complex as an intricate machine, *but without free will.* As omniscient as a finite being can ever be, but without the power to change one thing.

That's the reason he had gone away. *I* was the reason. I had tried to explain it to him. He listened with intense interest.

I told him, "All of non-living substance, and all the lower forms of life are governed completely by natural law. Only the human has the power of choice, independent of what went before and independent of pressures trying to force action this way or that. A man, KNOWING what the next moment will produce, can change it—if for no other rea-

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son than just to make it different. A world champion tennis player with the championship dependent on one easy ball he will hit in the next second, can deliberately throw the championship away by making a deliberate miss."

Chih jen shook his fine, godlike head when I said that. "To me," he said, "It appears that you are presenting a rationalization of a blindness to the unchangeable future, a device of pretending there are alternative actualities matching your degree of blindness. A projection of the uncertainties in your thoughts into the external reality. You find security in believing you have a choice, every moment, don't you."

"Well, of course!" I said. "It's only by having the ability to make up my own mind and choose that I'm happy."

"I see," he said slowly, sadly. "I had thought to bring light and enlightenment but it would be a world of nightmare to this small world that delights in an illusion of uncertainty. The lure of gambling is not the winning, but the uncertainty, the mechanic who knows the stranger is going to be in serious trouble shortly defies the certainty he knows of by a myth of hoping to alter the certainty and is unhappy when he can't. And that which should be happily accepted becomes unacceptable when the illusion of uncertainty is gone from it. This is a strange corner of the cosmos."

"Oh, you're just finding it out," I said, "You didn't know it before."

"I knew it," he said. "I came, I am leaving. It is all a book whose unturned pages I have read and accepted."

I knew I would never forget how he looked at me the last moment before I was again on the desert, seeming to snap out of a dream. With all his almost infinite powers he was defeated by his own convictions, unwilling to even try. I could sense the emptiness of his existence, the loneliness. The vast loneliness, as of a lonely sea that washes against timeless cliffs on an uninhabited shore . . .

"Jim," Sheila said. "Let's go before the others are all gone. If they all go, and my car wouldn't start, we would be stuck out here and we could die of thirst before we were rescued."

"Then how could we be married and me die before you do so you can get the insurance and be a rich widow?" I sneered.

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She touched my shoulder. "I'll always miss him too, Jim. That's why you're upset, isn't it."

"For heaven's sake!" I exploded. I strode angrily to the car and got in.

After a moment she followed me and got behind the wheel. The coyote was gone when we passed his lookout. It was beginning to get dark when we reached the highway. A few miles ahead the lights of a small town were already visible.

"I hope I can get a tow truck to pick up my car," I growled, staring at the passing sagebrush. "And," I added viciously, "I hope you're over this kick about it being all settled we're going to get married. When it comes to the girl I marry, I'll make up my own mind, and I'll ask her in my own good time. I'm not saying it *won't* be you, but I can tell you right now I'm prejudiced *against* you. I *like* you. In fact, I was thinking of asking you if you would let me treat you to dinner . . ."

"Sorry, Jim," she said, keeping her eyes on the road. "Some other time, maybe."

"Hey!" I said, sitting up in alarm. "What *is* this!" I stared at her cool profile, incredulous.

She shook her head, and a tear broke loose, staining her freckled cheek. "I guess your just not my type, Jim," she said, her lip quivering, as she stared straight ahead.

"Well!" I exhaled, "I'll be damned!" I shifted around and watched the sagebrush. So she was going to play hard to get now, was she—or was she serious?

I began to worry . . .

THE END

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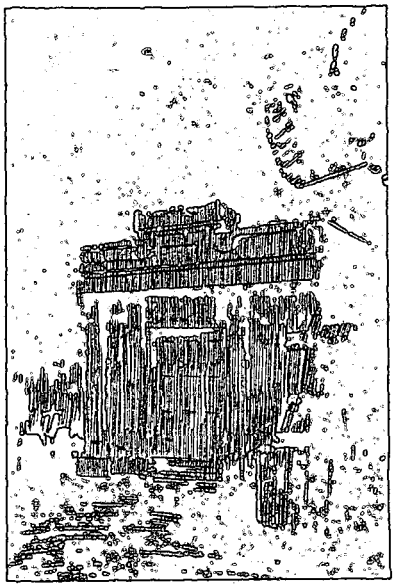

The Creeping Coffins Of Barbados

By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

ILLUSTRATOR WALDMAN

The "unexplainable" has fascinated mankind since the first cave man was awed by the rising sun. We've made progress since then, but the world is still full of occurrences that appear to transcend natural law. This last is impossible, of course, and true explanations lie in complete knowledge of the laws that govern nature. But until this knowledge is achieved, we mortals will continue to be baffled by the strange and unusual—by coffins, for instance, that conduct themselves as no well-behaved coffins should.

JULY 6th 1812 literally was the opening date of a mystery that had the unusual quality of persistence; that is to say, it repeated itself over a period of several years and created much amazement in two hemispheres. At the time of writing the whole affair seems every bit as baffling as it did nearly one and a half centuries ago.

What may be termed the source or fountainhead of the puzzle was a family vault in the graveyard of Christ Church, at Oistin's, on the south coast of Barbados. This vault had stood for some time without noteworthy incident

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and had changed proprietorship at least twice. It was constructed of big, solid blocks of coral-stone, firmly cemented, and built half above, half below ground level. Twelve feet long by six wide, it tapered slightly towards its arched roof. Its door was set in one side and closed by a great, cumbersome slab of marble. The whole affair could not have been built more solidly had it been intended to hold valuable merchandise rather than corpses.

The first burial recorded as having taken place in this vault was that of Mrs. Thomasina Goddard who was laid to rest on July 31st, 1807. The next was that of a child, Mary Anna Maria Chase, on February 22nd, 1808. Four years drifted by until, on July 6th, 1812, a funeral party arrived bearing the coffin of Dorcas Chase, sister of Mary Anna Maria. A couple of men lugged open the weighty door, the leading coffin bearers ducked their heads to get under the lintel, felt with their feet for the few steps into the vault, and when halfway down halted dumbfounded.

The coffin of Mrs. Thomasina Goddard now lay tossed to one side against a wall. That of Mary Anna Maria stood head downward in the corner opposite the one in which it had been put. This caused much excitement and considerable discussion among members of the funeral party. Eventually they decided that certain negroes who had attended the previous burial must have been guilty of this desecration. The coffins were restored to their proper positions and that of Dorcas reverently placed with them. The vault was then sealed and the mourners retired.

About one month later, on August 9th, 1812, the vault was opened again and the coffin of Thomas Chase, father of Mary and Dorcas, was placed therein. At that time everything was found just as it should be. Four more years passed. On September 25th, 1816, a party arrived with the coffin of another child, Samuel Brewster Ames. Negro laborers dragged open the weighty slab door. With fascinated horror, the mourners stared into the vault.

Again the coffins had been displaced. For reasons not recorded, the negro laborers once more were saddled with the blame despite their fervent protestations of innocence and their superstitious fear of the dead. The negroes themselves blamed evil spirits.

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The subject of the disturbed vault became discussed, and sometimes argued with heat, far and wide, the general tendency being to attribute the manifestations to some human agency, though the motive passed understanding.

On November 17th, 1816, the body of Samuel Brewster was transferred to the vault from its resting place at St. Philip. One cannot help wondering whether any relationship existed between this Samuel Brewster and Samuel Brewster Ames. If so, it is not stated; the original accounts treat them as quite unconnected. Anyway, by this time interest had been so greatly aroused that a curious mob attended the ceremony and waited in tense silence for the opening of the vault.

The marble slab was hauled aside. Once more the coffins were seen to be lying in complete disarray. The first of them, that of Mrs. Thomasina Goddard, had now come apart. The others were scattered around haphazardly, though lead-cased and very heavy. One of them was massive enough to require eight men to lift it.

Several members of the party now made detailed examination of the vault from wall to wall, floor to roof, but could discover not a clue to the mystery. The whole place was as tight as a drum and quite dry. Giving it up, they arranged the coffins in their proper places, tied together the pieces of Mrs. Goddard's coffin and put them against the wall, closed the entrance-slab and cemented it into position.

From that time onward the graveyard and its eerie vault became the chief sight of Barbados, a sort of obligatory stop on the tourist track. Not a day passed without Christ Church and its burial place getting a quota of visitors. The more trippers who came to stare around, the more people there were to debate the subject. Public interest built up to the point where the entire island could hardly await in patience the next opening.

This much anticipated date arrived on July 7th, 1819, when the coffin of Thomasina Clarke was to be placed in the vault. Because of general excitement, the funeral was attended by the Governor of Barbados, Lord Combermere, and two of his staff. A huge crowd assembled in a nervous semi-circle while laborers chipped away the cement seal, heaved aside the slab-door and revealed the interior of the vault.

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The bundled pieces of Mrs. Goddard's coffin still lay by the wall exactly where they had been placed. The other coffins were strewn around in utter disorder. Combermere and his officials ignored a strange coldness playing up and down their backs, entered the vault and checked every inch of it, even sounding the walls and floor in an effort to find a secret entrance. Their search was in vain. The whole vault was solid, without space for a mouse to get in. Completely baffled, the party strained and heaved to get the weighty coffins back into correct order. That done, they sprinkled a smooth, half-inch layer of fine white sand on the floor, hoping that in time it might show footprints or some marks providing a solution to the mystery. The slab-door was fitted into the entrance and very carefully cemented. On the cement Combermere made several impressions with his private seal. Several other witnesses followed suit with their own distinguishing marks. One thing now seemed beyond all doubt, namely, that nothing could now enter or leave the vault without betraying the fact.

Such precautions served only to stimulate excitement and curiosity to such a pitch that the next opening became impromptu rather than official. On April 18th, 1820, a group of people discussed the mystery of the vault, boosting each other's eagerness to learn whether anything more had happened and, if so, what signs were written in the sand.

They consisted of Lord Combermere, the Hon. Nathan Lucas, Mr. R. Bowcher Clarke, Mr. Rowland Cotton and the Governor's secretary, Major J. Finch. After a lot of unsatisfactory talk they decided the time had come for effective action. Accompanied by a small group of negro laborers from the adjoining plantation, they went to Christ Church and rooted out the rector, the Rev. Thomas Orderson, D. D. The whole party then made for the vault.

For a start, they spent considerable time examining the outside of the structure. It was as solid as such a building could be. Its blocks of coral-stone were hard, whole, without a crack, and set firmly into place. The cement around the door had become as hard as rock and bore its various marks and impressions unbroken. One and all agreed that nothing had been touched, nothing had been

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tampered with since the last burial.

Laborers had a tough job chipping away the improved cement around the door. After much effort they got the door free, dragged it aside to the accompaniment of strange rasping sounds. A final heave and the doorway was wide open, revealing that the door had been grating against it upsidedown. The other coffins again were higgledy-piggledy. There wasn't a betraying mark on the white sand.

To the people of Barbados in general, and Combermere in particular, this was the last straw. All the coffins were removed and buried elsewhere. The vault was left open and empty and has never been used since. This seems a great pity because it is likely that the mystery could be solved with the scientific devices we have today. A black light and a cinecamera loaded with suitable film, switched on and off electronically by the motion of any coffin, could produce a very revealing picture of just what goes on inside those dark walls.

Various accounts of this queer episode differ in minor particulars and in a few cases are so garbled as to make the story seem no more than a story, a West Indies myth. The most reliable and authoritative account is that of the Hon. Nathan Lucas, who says in part:

> "I examined the walls, the arch, and every part of the vault, and found every part old and similar; and a mason in my presence struck every part of the bottom with his hammer, and all was solid. I confess myself at a loss to account for the movement of these leaden coffins. Thieves certainly had no hand in it; and as for any practical wit or hoax, too many were requisite to be trusted with the secret for it to remain unknown; and as for negroes having anything to do with it, their superstitious fear of the dead and everything belonging to them precludes any idea of the kind. All I know is that it happened and that I was an eye-witness to the fact! ! ! !"

There have been other instances of coffins moving around apparently of their own volition, the cause being equally mystifying, the effect just as terrifying to witnesses. In 1844, some fear was created by the nervous antics of horses tethered at the cemetery of Arensburg, a small town on the Baltic island of

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Oesel. Mounted visitors arrived, tied their animals to hitching-rails, and while they were away the nags kicked wildly around in an effort to break free. It is said that several horses fainted and two or three died of sheer fright. Public edginess built up to panic when it was found that coffins had been moved around in some mysterious manner in a vault belonging to the Buxhoewden family.

According to the records, the affair started on June 22nd, 1844, when a Mme. Dalmann arrived on horseback to tend her mother's grave. By the time she returned to where she had tethered her horse the animal was in such a state that she took it to a veterinary surgeon. All that worthy could say was that the horse had been greatly terrified by something or other. About a week later a number of horses were similarly affected while waiting at the cemetery. A fortnight after that eleven horses went mad.

Then followed a Buxhoewden burial. The funeral service was held in the family's private chapel and while it was going on several mourners thought they heard strange noises in the adjoining vault. Immediately the service had ended the toughest characters charged into the vault hoping to catch whatever had caused the sounds. They were out of luck. All was now silence and they found nothing — except that the coffins had been tossed around in confusion. They tidied the place up, stacked the coffins neatly, and locked the vault.

The news of this episode went the rounds and lost nothing in the telling. It is a good guess that someone saw fit to drag in the subject of vampires and werewolves. At any rate, so much alarm was created that the President of the Consistory, Baron de Guldenstubbe, intervened in person. Accompanied by two members of the Buxhoewden family, he made an official visit to the vault. Again the coffins lay all over the shop.

More baffled than scared, de Guldenstubbe at once appointed a committee of eight to look into the matter. This investigatory group consisted of himself, the bishop of the province, the burgomaster of Arensburg, three civic officials, a local doctor, and a secretary. Once assembled they marched to the vault, examined it from top to bottom and end to end. They found nothing of any significance.

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Thinking that robbers might be the culprits, they also examined the coffins but found none had suffered interference.

There is quite a parallel between this case and that at Barbados. In both, the initiative was taken by the district's leading dignitary accompanied by persons of recognized standing. In both, an inspection was made thoroughly, systematically and without waiting for another burial. And in both cases a secret entrance was sought and the device of coating the floor was employed.

Beaten for any other explanation, the Arensburg committee decided that some evil-minded person must have burrowed into the vault and disturbed the coffins for horrid reasons of his own. They went a lot farther than having the place sounded with hammers. Summoning a gang of workers, they had the entire floor taken up and the vault's foundations inspected. No ghoul's tunnel could be found, nor anything else that made sense. Completely thwarted, the committee gave up futile guessing. Under their orders the workmen restored the coffins to their rightful places, sprinkled a layer of fine wood-ash all over the floor, locked the vault. The inner and outer doors of the vault were then impressed around the edges with the official seals of the Consistory, the municipality of Arensburg, and the bishop. More wood-ash was spread over the stairs leading from the vault and over the floor of the chapel. The local garrison placed a strong guard around the chapel, changing it frequently and maintaining it for three days and nights.

After that time the committee made solemn return to this scene of God-knows-what. The ashes in the chapel and on the steps to the vault bore not a single mark or trace of any kind. The numerous seals on the vault's outer and inner doors were all intact. Breaking the seals, they unlocked and entered the vault. The scene was one of utmost confusion. Coffins lay scattered hither and thither, a dozen of them or more. A few were standing on end, head down. The lid of one had burst open along one edge and a skeletal arm protruded from the gap.

Like their counterparts in Barbados, the committee decided that enough was enough. All the coffins were taken out and interred elsewhere, the vault being abandoned. An official report was compiled,

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placed in the archives of Arensburg, and there the matter ended.

A long time afterwards, in late 1906, a certain Count Perovsky Petrovo-Solovo tried to trace this report for the Society for Psychical Research. He found that the Arensburg archives had been transferred to Riga. Authorities there made search on his behalf, could not find the report, suggested he might discover it among the archives of the Church of St. Laurentius at Arensburg. The Count wrote there, got a reply from the pastor, the Rev. Lemm, saying that he could not unearth the report either, having already hunted for it on behalf of the present Baron Buxhoewden who had also failed to lay hands on it.

Petrovo-Solovo then communicated with Buxhoewden who replied saying that the report had defeated all his attempts to find it, but he was not inclined to doubt that it had existed because ". . . All of the old persons whom I have questioned upon the subject remember the incident in question perfectly, and the greater number of them affirm that they have heard it said that an official report was drawn up."

Rupert T. Gould, who considered the mystery of creeping coffins in his book *Oddities*, admits that failure to find the Arensburg committee's report tempts one to think that the whole affair is just a fanciful yarn. But he is not impressed by the efficiency of second- or third-hand search, pointing out that the searcher has not the same interest or enthusiasm as the originator of the quest.

To prove it, he cites one of his own experiences. Certain drawings had been handed to the Astronomer Royal in 1841 and placed in safe custody of Greenwich Observatory. Gould needed a look at these drawings by way of gathering material for his book *The Marine Chronometer*. The observatory authorities made lengthy and careful search on his behalf and failed to find any trace of them. Not to be beaten, Gould asked permission to seek them himself. Leave was granted. He almost turned the Observatory upside-down, found the drawings stowed in the unlikeliest place.

It is very possible that the Arensburg committee's report still gathers dust in a long neglected pigeonhole somewhere or other. Certainly Baron Buxhoewden, whose

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family history is concerned, seemed satisfied that such a report really had been written and placed in local archives.

The full story of the disturbed coffins of Arensburg was told on May 8th, 1859, by the son and daughter of Baron de Guldenstubbe, to Robert Dale Owen who published it in 1861 in his book *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*. So far as is known this was the first time the complete account appeared in print.

In another book, *West Indian Tales of Old*, the author, Sir Algernon E. Aspinall, couples the Barbados coffin mystery with a similar one in England more or less around the same time. He quotes the *European Magazine*, September, 1815, which mentions the curious vault at Stanton in Suffolk:

> "On opening it some years since, several leaden coffins with wooden cases, that had been fixed on biers, were found displaced, to the great astonishment of many inhabitants of the village. The coffins were placed as before, and properly closed; when, some time ago, another of the family dying, they were a second time found displaced; and two years after, they were not only found off all the biers, but one coffin as heavy as to require eight men to raise it was found on the fourth step that leads into the vault. Whence arose this operation, in which it was certain that no one had a hand? N. B.—It was occasioned by water, as is imagined, though no sign of it appeared at the different periods of time that the vault was opened."

Yet another instance is in the letter columns of *Notes and Queries*, in 1867, where a Mr. F. C. Paley tells of heavy lead coffins being disarranged two or three times in a vault in the parish of Gretford, near Stamford, where, at the time, his father was the rector. He describes one of the coffins as being so weighty that six men could carry it only with much difficulty. The events created considerable excitement in the village.

Paley added a letter dated October 15th, 1867, from a witness who confirmed his details and said that the coffins were made of lead, encased in wood, and that some had been found tilted on one side against the wall. This witness believed that the coffins must have floated around during some period when the vault

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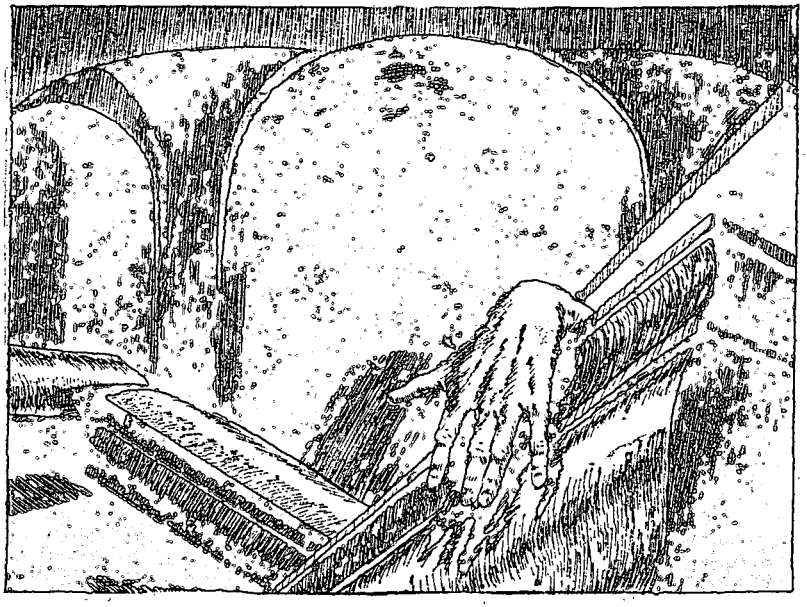
contained a considerable quantity of water though when opened there was no evidence of it ever having been flooded.

The later Baron Buxhoewden also believed that his forebears had been given a major scare by nothing more than water, though he was not a witness to the event. Flooding certainly was a theory considered by the baffled Arensburg committee who sought proof of it and found none. It does not seem likely that a cold, solidly built vault, partly below ground-level, could accumulate enough water to float a number of coffins and then dry out so swiftly and completely as to leave not the slightest indication of what had happened.

Considering this theory of flooding, Rupert T. Gould points out that a lead coffin could float even with a fifty-pound weight attached to it. He estimates that such a casket would weigh about nine hundred pounds, the weight of water it would displace comes to about eleven hundred and fifty pounds, leaving a difference of some two hundred and fifty pounds for the body. Most cadavers weigh under two hundred.

As evidence of such buoy-



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ancy, Gould quotes the *London Evening Post* May 16th, 1751, which reports that the ship *Johannes*, commanded by Captain Wyrck Pietersen, had picked up from the open sea the wood-cased lead coffin of one Francis Humphrey Merrydith. This macabre object was found bobbing among the waves a few weeks after Merrydith had been buried in the Goodwin Sands in accordance with his last request.

I have made considerable effort to discover instances of disturbed vaults dated in the twentieth century, but with no luck. If any such exist they have not been widely reported or perhaps the details have been suppressed According to F. C. Paley, the ruckus at Gretford was hushed up "out of respect for the family concerned."

Changes in customs undoubtedly account in some part for lack of recent data. In modern times most people are cremated or buried in graves and the practice of using family vaults has almost died out. A coffin doesn't get much chance to prance around when pinned in by earth on all sides.

The idea of coffins floating about in a temporarily water logged vault provides a tempting explanation of the eerie scene when the vault is opened after going dry. But the theory is not fully satisfactory. In three cases—those at Arensburg, Gretford and Stanton—water was suspected to be the cause, evidence of it sought and not found. As for the happenings at Barbados, flooding was well-nigh impossible because the vault stood on high ground and, to use an apt simile, remained at all times as dry as a bone.

Again, the vault at Barbados contained not only the disturbed lead coffins but also the bundled wooden staves of Mrs. Goddard's coffin, which bundle was the only item *not* found displaced. And at Arensburg, where the total number of coffins is not on record but is known to have exceeded a dozen, all were thrown around save three. On each occasion these three and only these three remained in position. They were wooden coffins, devoid of metal linings or outer casings.

If water can float lead it can certainly float wood. The theory of flooding does not fit the facts and poses the baffling question of why metal objects were moved, but not wooden ones.

The theory favored by (then) color-conscious Bar-

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badians, namely, that Negroes were to blame, hardly fits the facts of that particular case and certainly cannot be applied to similar ones elsewhere. The notion took hold in Barbados mostly because one of the inmates of the vault, Thomas Chase, was considered a cruel, overbearing man who, it was said, was heartily detested by his Negro employees and had driven his own daughter Dorcas to suicide. It does not seem credible that, having solved the problem of how to break into the vault in undetectable manner, vengeful Negroes would rest content merely to move the coffins around. And no hate-filled colored men snooped by night around the vaults of Gretford, Stanton and Arensburg. Indeed, it is extremely doubtful whether there was a solitary Negro on the Island of Oesel at that time.

Third-hand investigation of the Barbados mystery has been conducted from time to time by many people, authors especially. One of the latter was the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He studied the case from every angle but, alas, when he came up with his conclusions the shrewd perceptiveness that had created Sherlock Holmes was conspicuous by its absence and it was the spiritualist side of him that pronounced its verdict. Doyle made confusing comments about Negroes' bodily emanations, and the residual life-force supposedly remaining in the bodies of suicides and others who have died before their time, and came down in favor of interference by powers supernatural. The weight one gives to such an idea is based more on faith than on facts.

The consistent feature of all these cases is that metal objects can be caused to move by some unknown force, possibly with the provisions that the metal can be lead, of a certain weight, shape and bulk, resting in certain places at particular times. Similar conditions switch from the strange to the familiar when the metal object happens to be a needle of magnetized iron.

This writer feels that we might have a highly significant phenomenon to study if only we could find accurate drawings of all these vaults showing the precise manner in which the coffins were arranged before and after disturbance. There might well be some detectable order in all the so-called disorder, some

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clue to an unknown but natural force capable of analysis, development and exploitation.

This supposition does have modest basis. There are two drawings concerning one instance. These show the positions of the coffins as originally placed and as found later in the vault at Barbados when opened on April 18th, 1820. The impression they create at first glance is one of inexplicable transition from order to chaos. But a second look shows that the disturbed coffins have a peculiar orderliness of their own. Their placing certainly cannot be called haphazard though radically different from their original arrangement.

As first placed, three large coffins were put in a neat row with the middle one set slightly farther away from the vault's door. Three smaller coffins sat tidily on top of the big ones. All had their feet towards the door, their heads towards the back of the vault, their longitudinal axes parallel to the side walls.

When found out of place all coffins were in varying but fairly regular stages of reversal, their heads now being more or less towards the door, their feet more or less towards the back wall. They look exactly as if caught when rotating at snail's pace around their own centres of gravity, some having twisted farther than others, their axes now cutting through an arc of about 120 degrees. The picture they present is that of a swirl, or a spiral effect, like so many metal shapes, heavier at one end than the other, spun around by some force gravitational, gyroscopic, electromagetic or goodness knows what.

Being sufficiently bigoted not to believe in supernatural powers, this writer refuses to credit that any coffins have been moved around anywhere by ghosties or eerie beasties or things that go boomp in the night. Whatever shifted the coffins at Barbados and elsewhere was, I believe, a force natural enough though not within our knowledge even at the present date.

And I do think it highly probable that the swirling appearance of coffins in one drawing is a broad hint at something worth learning if only we can get hold of it. From the power betrayed by the trembling lid of a kettle we developed huge locomotives; we should do no less with a force than can spin nine hundred pounds of lead around.

THE END

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(Continued from page 15)

services." Her voice was low, clear, calm.

"What would you need a detective for?"

"I want to find a man."

He lifted his eyebrows unbelievingly. "Offhand, I'd say you'd be tripping all over them."

"This one is different."

"Different?"

"He's my fiance."

"My humble apologies."

"Perhaps you can help me to find my future husband?"

"Is the search urgent?"

"The sooner the better."

"He's in danger?"

She hesitated a brief second. "I don't know. He's just missing."

"Since when?"

"This afternoon."

"Isn't it a little too early to become alarmed?" Macreal glanced at his watch. "He'll probably show up right on time for your date tonight."

"He didn't show up for my date this afternoon. I was supposed to meet him at the Capitol Building in the Senate Gallery."

Macreal laughed. "Probably couldn't stand the prospect of listening to all that gassing," he said. "Look, Miss . . ."

"Marlowe. Diane Marlowe."

"Miss Marlowe. I hardly think it's necessary to get excited over the non-appearance of your fiance. If he doesn't show up by tomorrow, come back, and I'll have a try at finding him."

She stood for a moment as though undecided. "Perhaps you're right," she said. "Maybe I'm making a mountain out of a molehill."

"I'm sure you are. He'll show up."

"Thank you." She turned and walked from the office. Macreal watched as she went. Then he put on his hat and followed her . . .

After a few blocks he fumbled in his pocket, found an envelope. He took out his pad and pencil and scribbled hastily on the pad as he walked along. Then he tore off the sheet, folded it, and stuck it in the envelope. He sealed it, then frowned.

"Need a stamp . . ." he said, staring at the envelope. An instant later he frowned again. "Not exactly the right color . . ." He shrugged, held the envelope in his hand as he walked on, following the girl as she made her way along the street. As he passed a mailbox, he flipped the envelope into it.

The girl walked on for several blocks before she turned

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into an apartment building. Macreal quickened his pace, and as he went by he saw her pressing her thumb on an apartment bell. He walked on, then stopped, turned, and came back. As he passed this time, he saw that the foyer was empty. The inner door was just closing, and beyond it he saw a pair of extremely trim ankles disappearing up the carpeted stairway. He veered in toward the apartment entrance, opened the outer door. Inside, he looked at the number above the button the girl had been pressing.

"Albert Wilson," he said to himself. "So that's his name? Anyway, he's not missing."

He pressed the bell button and waited. A man's voice came from the communicator. "Who's there?"

"John Macreal," answered Macreal. "Miss Marlowe invited me to come up and visit you."

There was no answer, but the door-lock buzzed, and Macreal swung it open. He went on up the stairs and halted finally before an apartment door. He knocked. It opened and the man in the gray pinstripe suit appeared.

"Come in, Mr. Macreal," he said calmly. "I rather hoped you'd come. Your own invitation via that note on your personalized notepaper was rather obvious."

"Thank you," said Macreal. He entered, and the man in the pin stripe closed the door behind him.

Macreal faced him. "I don't believe I know your name," he said.

"It's the same as the one on the mailbox down below, if you're in doubt as to whether this is the right apartment. I'm Albert Wilson."

"Glad to meet you," said Macreal. "And now, if you will do me the service, what are you up to?"

"Don't you know?"

"I believe so. You're preventing the passing of several Senate bills. In fact, you succeeded this morning in what I assume is your first effort in that direction."

"Do you agree that Bill 1145 was bad?"

"Yes."

"Then you know what I'm up to. I'm a public-spirited citizen who is doing his best to make our government as effective in the interests of the American People as possible. I doubt if you'd consider that a crime."

"No. As a matter of fact, I am definitely in favor of it. But what I want to know is *how* you are doing it."

"Very simple. Hypnotism.

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And now that I've answered your question, may I ask one of my own?"

"Certainly."

"Why did you warn me in the Senate gallery this afternoon?"

"Senator Voorhees hired me to apprehend you. I knew that Senator Riley also had men after you."

Wilson said, "That pileup behind me was perfectly executed. And you knew which way I had gone, yet you ran the other way. What am I to deduce from that?"

Macreal shrugged. "I didn't want you caught."

"Why not?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"You're right, I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

Albert Wilson produced an envelope from his pocket. It had been torn open. Macreal recognized it as the one he'd dropped into the mailbox not fifteen minutes ago, three blocks down the street.

"How did you get that?" he asked.

"Hypnotism," said Wilson with a humorless smile. "You only *thought* you mailed it."

"Yes, but how did *you* get it?"

"Miss Marlowe gave it to me."

"And how did she get it?"

"You gave it to her."

Macreal considered this carefully for a moment. "She must be an excellent hypnotist. I'd have sworn she never looked back, never stopped."

"Yes. Now you understand how we accomplished what we did in the Senate chamber today?"

"That word *understand* is misleading."

"You will understand that I've read what's in this letter, won't you?"

"It makes things rather difficult for me," said Macreal. "Now you will be convinced that I am intent on apprehending you."

"And you had hoped to convince me otherwise?"

"I had."

Wilson shrugged. "You are undoubtedly favorable to what we are doing," he said, "and also as undoubtedly you are loyal to the government as represented by Senator Voorhees. You have been commissioned to track us down, and you will do your best to place us in custody. It is regrettable. Perhaps when all this is over, we will meet again, and we can be friends."

"I'm sure of it," said Macreal. "But, just what are you going to do now?" He drew a gun and leveled it at Wilson. "You are under arrest."

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"On what charge?"

"Rifling the United States mails."

"This letter was never mailed."

"It has a United States stamp on it, and the intent was there. As far as I am concerned, I definitely did mail it, and no other testimony on my part could be possible."

"Mr. Macreal," came the calm voice of Diane Marlowe from behind him, "I suggest that you drop your gun."

Macreal dropped his gun.

"Now turn around."

He turned. The girl was smiling at him. Her hands were at her sides. She had no gun.

"I couldn't accept any chances," said Macreal. "Even if I was sure you were too nice a girl to shoot anyone. Now I presume that Mr. Wilson has me covered?"

"Why don't you look and see?" she said.

Macreal turned. Wilson was gone. The outer door hadn't opened, and there was no other way for him to exit from the room except by the doorway in which the girl stood. Macreal turned back to the girl.

She was gone.

He leaped forward, through the doorway, found himself in a bedroom. It was empty. The window was closed. There was no other way out.

For a long instant Macreal stood looking thoughtfully about. Then he made his way from the bedroom, let himself out of the apartment, and returned to the street.

He took a sheet of paper from his pocket as he walked. He read it over to himself. "If I do not report to you at 6:00 P.M., look for a Miss Diane Marlowe. Her address is in the phone book. Macreal." He grinned and put the note into his pocket. Then he said softly to himself: "Hypnotism, Mr. Wilson? Wonder what you'll say when you discover there are two playing the game!"

"At least we have one advantage, Diane; he doesn't know that we know about him."

"You were tempted to let him know you knew the stamp was slightly off-color," said the girl. "When I saw you considering that, I almost stepped out of the room right then and there."

"It proves one thing," said Wilson. "He isn't a telepath."

"Let's see that note he wrote."

Wilson handed over the envelope. Diane looked inside. "The note's not in here."

"Not there? Must have for-

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gotten to put it back . . ." Wilson fumbled in his pocket.

"Never mind. It isn't in your pocket."

"Then where . . . ?"

"He may not be a telepath, but he's an excellent teleporter and he knows I teleported that letter from the mailbox."

"We may have to kill him," said Wilson.

"I wouldn't like that."

"You like him?"

"He likes *me*," she said.

"Do you think you can control him?"

"No."

Wilson lifted his eyebrows. "He's quite a man!"

"Yes."

"In that case, I'm afraid I'll have to assign you to another phase of our operation. Any emotionalism on your part might be disastrous. However, out of respect for that emotionalism, I promise you that we'll not kill him. We'll try to sidetrack him until we have the situation under control. Then he may come to our side. Especially since there will be nothing he can do about it."

"I'm afraid you'll underestimate him," she said. "You might feel the need to do something desperate."

"I won't underestimate him," said Wilson, looking at her for a long moment. "And I'm beginning to see the basis for your feelings. Our Mr. Macreal must be quite something. If he's really on the other side, he'll need more than just evasive tactics. We'll *really* have to try to fool him."

"He's not a telepath," said Diane. "Otherwise you'd never have the slightest chance of fooling him, and if he were a telepath, I'd not agree to another assignment."

Macreal cocked his feet up on his desk and dialed a number while he tucked the receiver into the crook of his shoulder. When the phone was answered, he said: "Let me talk to your boss. Tell him it's Macreal."

"He's already told me to put your call through, Mr. Macreal," said the girl at the other end. "Here's Senator Voorhees . . ."

"Macreal?" came Voorhees' voice. "Get your man?"

"I've got him," said Macreal.

"In custody?"

"Of course not. I mean I've got the right man. He's it, all right, but he's not alone. I gather there is a large organization. Dozens of people, maybe hundreds. This will be a tough job to ferret them all out."

"Hundreds!" exclaimed Voorhees in dismay. "Then

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you certainly acted rightly in that roughhouse stuff in the Senate gallery. If Riley's men had nabbed him, we'd have lost any chance to track down the rest. Do you have any leads?"

"I've talked to our man."

"*Talked* to him!"

"Yes. And I managed to convey the impression that I was a dangerous man."

"You're asking for it!"

"He can't do it alone."

Senator Voorhees was silent an instant, then he chuckled. "I see. But I hope the whole bunch of them don't come at you at once. You're not that good."

"The whole Russian secret police force came at me once. And they didn't get me. I can handle the group."

"That's true," admitted Senator Voorhees. "And you never told anybody how you did it."

"Got to have some secrets. The element of surprise, you know, Senator. It's half the battle . . ."

"Don't be too cocky, though," warned the Senator. "And keep me posted. If you need help, just ask for it. Every man in C. I. will be at your disposal the minute you give the word."

"You're really worried about this."

"I am. All of our atomic submarines are missing."

Macreal considered a moment. "How do you link the two events?"

"The captain of the *North Star* came ashore to report to the president, and he said it was on orders."

"It wasn't?"

"Of course not. At least not written orders."

"Does he know who gave him the verbal orders?"

"He didn't even realize he'd been given verbal orders, until he arrived to report. And then he had no idea how he got them. He's a mighty confused man."

"So I imagine. How about the president?"

"You don't think we're fools enough to let him get to see the president?"

"I see," said Macreal. Then: "Okay, I'll report further within twelve hours. I'm going to get the names of the rest of the gang, if it's possible." He hung up the phone.

He looked in the phone book, found the address he wanted, and left his office. A half-hour later he was standing in the lobby of an apartment building. He looked on the directory board and found the name Diane Marlowe. The apartment number was 223.

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He laid a hand on the lobby door. The latch clicked. He pulled the door open and walked up to the second floor.

At the door to 223 he paused an instant, then knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again. Then glancing briefly around, he transferred himself to the other side of the door. Inside it was dark, and he stood silent a moment while he probed the recesses of the apartment with his mind. It was empty.

He caused a slight glow of light to precede him as he searched the apartment. It was bright enough to see what he was doing, but hardly enough illumination to show up outside the room either through the windows or beneath the door.

He found nothing until he got to the bedroom. Then he found himself staring at a very official-looking steel file cabinet standing beside the bed. Laid out on the bed itself were stacks of folders and papers that had obviously been removed from the file. The file itself, standing in the middle of the room, was in the way, being directly between the bed and the dresser. Certainly a strange place to keep a file.

Macreal read the cards on the front of the file. CLASSIFIED. The subheads caused him to lift his eyebrows. *Top Secret. U.F.O. File T-8657. Communications.*

"One of the Pentagon files," muttered Macreal. "This is even worse than I thought. There'll be no thing in the world secret from this mob."

The presence of this file in Diane Marlowe's bedroom could mean only one thing—she had teleported it from the Pentagon. And from the pattern of the files and papers piled on her bed, she was scanning the contents thoroughly and systematically.

He glanced through several of the files and his eyes went wide. "So that's it?" he said aloud. "I should have known!" For a moment his jaw was tight, then it relaxed and smiled. "Like little lambs being led around by the nose." He laughed. "U.F.O. Communications! Intercepted messages! Stealing the scientific secrets of a super-race! Oh my maiden aunt!"

Suddenly he transferred himself beyond the closet door and remained standing silently in the dark. Outside he heard the apartment door close, and a light click on. Then came the sound of a closet door opening, a moment of silence, the sound of it closing again. Now came the

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sound of high-heel shoes, the sound of another door opening, the change in sound from wooden floor to tile floor. Another light clicked on. More sounds, this time minus the sound of clicking heels. Water running. Then at last the soft pad of bare feet entering the bedroom. The light clicked on, and the closet was dimly illumined by a bar of light that came from beneath the door.

The footsteps approached the closet door and Macreal realized that he was standing in the midst of a collection of negligees and various other articles of feminine garments. As the door opened, he was ready. He held out a frilly-laced robe as she looked at him, startled.

"My apologies," he said. "I didn't expect you to skin down the minute you got in the front door. I presume this is the robe you are looking for?"

The startled attitude she had instinctively assumed relaxed, and with a slightly amused look she took the robe from him and slipped into it. He watched the operation admiringly. "It's a beautiful robe," he said.

"Thank you, and actually, I should have been expecting you. You *did* suggest in that note that you knew I was listed in the phone book."

"Why did you come back here?" he asked, stepping out of the closet. "Wouldn't it be the better part of valor for both you and Mr. Wilson to stop using your apartments the instant you knew they were known?"

"Not really that important," she said. "The knowledge would hardly do anyone any good, as you must have discovered in Mr. Wilson's apartment. I could have vanished as instantly now as I did then."

"Stark naked?" he grinned. "You'd be a welcome surprise at your destination."

She smiled back. "It would depend on where I went," she said. She sat down on the edge of the bed, shoved aside some of the files of papers and motioned to the cleared space.

"Sit down, I know you want to ask some more questions."

He accepted her invitation. He waved a hand at the Pentagon file. "Your work?"

"Yes. I'd intended to return it this evening, but when I got the call to pay you a visit, I wasn't quite finished with the contents."

"I assume you return it the same way you did the vanishing act?"

"You should know."

He looked at her sharply.

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"You saw where I got that stamp?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think about that?"

She shrugged. "You're one of us, apparently, but you're on the wrong side."

"The side of law and order and government is the wrong side?"

"Of course not."

"Then I'm afraid I don't understand."

"What makes you think people like Senator Voorhees and Senator Riley are on the right side?"

"They're part of the government."

"Then the government is on the wrong side."

"That's an academic argument at the moment," he said. "There's no point in us going into it. But for your information, because I think I'd like you to have it, I'm in sympathy with the same things your group seems to be, but I feel that you are going at it in the wrong way."

"How so?"

"Back in 1939 a man named Hitler had his own ideas of what the world should be like, and he did it the wrong way."

"There's absolutely no comparison!" she said angrily. "We're not insane killers."

"Power is a funny thing," said Macreal. "Sometimes the persons who wield it don't feel that they are being dictatorial, but too often it winds up that way. Don't you see that you can't control the world into the pattern you want by force?"

"The force is harming no one."

"But you will have the whole normal world against you. Stealing those atomic submarines, for instance. Do you think that will look like a good thing to the ordinary man on the street? He's not the peace-loving creature you seem to think he is. He won't, in the main, react to the removal of his weapons as a 'good thing,' but he will mistrust the power that you use in removing them. Why should he trust you, a complete . . . alien, an . . . unhuman?"

"Unhuman!" her eyes widened. She looked at him steadily for a moment. "I see what you mean." She leaned forward intently. "Do you think I am . . . unhuman? Is . . . is that what you think?"

"First I'd have to define the word *human*."

"I'd be interested in your definition."

"Well, this is the way I see it. The original life force on this planet was conscious, but

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not *self*-conscious. It existed, but didn't *know* it existed."

"You mean . . . like a . . . paramecium?"

"That's it, exactly. When life began, it didn't realize it was alive. It's actions were, well, not even instinctive. Just haphazard. Then evolution went on, and eventually, through many steps, the higher animal world was evolved. Up to apes."

"You think man came from apes?"

"Partially. I think his physical structure came from the original ape-like culmination of evolution on this planet. After that, I think there was a cross-breed of an entirely alien form . . . something from somewhere else than the Earth."

"Where else?"

He waved a hand at the Pentagon file. "You're obviously very much interested in the U. F. O. and it would seem that they are proof of the existence of other forms of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. Perhaps, just as they are now, the flying saucers came to earth in those long-gone days when an ape was still just an ape, and the process of evolution was given an artificial boost that suddenly brought that new factor into life."

"What new factor?"

"The consciousness of self. The realization of the fact of existence. Man became more than just conscious, he *knew* he was conscious. This was the second step in the evolution of Mankind, the first step being all of evolution in the physical up to then. It was an important step because it made him a creator by allowing life force to function through him creatively. No longer was he a brute, governed by his environment. He built buildings to shelter him, clothing to clothe him, he discovered electricity, constructed airplanes, built up a vast and complex mechanical civilization. He learned how to labor and to construct the things that were in his mind. He could picture a chair, and proceed to build one, using wood, his hands, and tools."

"That's where man is now."

"Yes. I suppose he is what you are referring to when you use the word *human*. Before this second step in evolution, he was a brute. He might always have been an animal, but in varying evolutionary degree. From brute, to human, to . . ."

"To what?"

"To Man. True Man. The third step in the evolution of mankind. Now, on the third

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level, he has reached a more full realization of his creative powers. He knows the primary source of power, and the primary method of application of that power. He can now, or rather a very few of his kind, create solely with mind. He knows now that the airplane is not necessary for transportation, because he can transport himself with thought. In other words, he realizes that mind is the creative medium which by its own authority causes plastic oversoul, variously called the Universal *sub*conscious, Primary Substance, ether, to form automatically at his command."

He looked at her intently. "In that respect, you are not human. You are Man."

"I'd rather you used another term," she said.

"Woman," he corrected.

"That's better," she said.

"Now how about you answering a few questions, and giving me your idea of what should be done to adjust the world to this new evolutionary step?"

"You already know how we are trying to do it. We're using our powers to influence things, such as preventing bad legislation, gradually nullifying arms preparations, taking over key positions. In a few years we will control the world, make it a place of peace and contentment, and gradually, as more and more of man as you term him, appears on this planet, the new age will dawn until it is firmly established."

"As simple as that, eh?"

"Why not?"

"Women, up to now, have always been the most creative, not strictly mechanically speaking; but no more. True, they are still the Mother of Mankind, but not almost the primary factor in the creation of life. Man, as a male, will play the dominant role in the future ... ."

"What do you mean?" she asked, curiously. "You don't mean the men will have the babies now, do you?" she smiled a bit loftily.

"Of course not. But all the same . . ." he grinned, ". . . we'll take more of the credit. Let me explain . . ."

He took off a ring on his finger and held it up so that the diamond in it sparked in the light. "See this ring? It is a result of the conscious awareness of the creative ability, and it was fashioned mechanically. Hands and tools were used. Now, watch that light as I try to demonstrate what I mean . . ."

He turned the ring slowly

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in the light, and the little sparklets from the diamond reflected the light in various beautiful shades as he turned it.

"Watch the light," he said softly. "The secret's in the colors in the light. As you will observe, the light is growing stronger . . . stronger . . ."

In the same monotone, he went on: "Who are the members of your group, as you are aware of them now?"

There was a moment as she stared fixedly at the ring, then suddenly she wrenched her gaze away from the sparkling diamond. "Trying to hypnotize me!" she said angrily. She leaped to her feet, and stood before him, face flushed, breasts heaving. "So you are not the least bit in sympathy with us! You came here to learn the names of the members of our group, so you could round them all up! Well, you won't succeed!"

She threw herself upon him and clasped her arms around his body tightly. Her soft body pressed against him hard; he felt its warmth surge exotically through him. Then the room grew dark and he felt himself whirling dizzily. A moment of swift transition, and he found himself lying on the floor, still entangled in the arms of Diane Marlowe, and she was screaming: "Hold him Albert! He's trying to trick me . . ."

Aware now of the danger of his situation, Macreal tore from her grasp, but before he could get to his feet to orient himself, a form bore down upon him and something solid smashed against his temple. Everything went black and he went down into unconsciousness.

Diane stared down at Macreal's body on the floor, horror and shock in her eyes. "You've killed him!" she cried.

"I'm sorry," said Wilson. "It was absolutely necessary."

"But you promised!" Diane's voice registered shock and grief. "You promised! I teleported him here so you could put him into electronic detention! He'd have been harmless, that way. Then after things were under control, he could have been released. I could have handled him . . ."

"No," said Wilson. "If he had been allowed to live, he could have destroyed all of us."

"He *wouldn't* have! He wouldn't have destroyed *me*!"

"I'll grant you the latter," said Wilson. "But that is because of an emotional factor. I told you it couldn't be tolerated. Now I find you in his

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presence almost unclothed, and apparently you had been together for some time. Where were you, by the way, before you grabbed him and teleported him here?"

"In my apartment," she said. "But there was no emotional factor involved! He was hiding in my bedroom closet. That's how I happened to be undressed. I didn't know he was there!"

"How long did you talk to him?"

"Perhaps a half-hour."

"And what did he want?"

"He tried to hypnotize me and discover the names of all our group. He held up a ring and began to quiz me."

"You see! For once you'll have to admit your being a telepath wasn't an advantage. In spite of it, he fooled you as to his intentions. Thus, what you believe you saw in his mind as to his true intentions can well be in error—and it only proves how really dangerous he was. He could mask his true thoughts from you, the only true telepathist among us. Why, with the powers he had, he might have destroyed us all, once he had located us. If I hadn't killed him, I'd do it now, after what you've just told me. How do you know he didn't actually hypnotize you and you now believe he failed, acting under post-hypnotic suggestion?"

"No," said Diane wildly. "He *didn't* hypnotize me. He loved me . . ."

Wilson took her by both arms and shook her. "Pull yourself together," he said. "And teleport yourself back to your apartment. Stay there until I contact you. What's done is done, and it can't be undone. He's dead, and you'll have to accept the fact."

She looked at him as though dazed, then her head dropped and she began to sob. Still sobbing she vanished from his sight.

Back in her apartment she sat for a long time, weeping softly, then finally she grew more composed. She went back into her bedroom, stuffed the file folders back into the file cabinet, and teleported it back to its place in the Pentagon. Then she opened her bed and crept into it. As she did so, something fell on the floor. She picked it up. It was Macreal's ring. She put it on her finger and turning out the light, lay wide-eyed in bed for a long time before she finally fell asleep.

Senator Voorhees looked up impatiently as Senator Riley came into the room. "What'd

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you call me over here for? and what's the idea of bringing the police into this thing?"

Senator Riley said: "I did not bring the police into it. They don't know a thing about it. As a matter of fact, we're lucky. I've been able to prevent an investigation that might have proven embarrassing. That's why I asked you to come down to the morgue and identify the body yourself."

"Whose body?"

"Come on down and look."

Senator Voorhees followed Senator Riley from the room. In the corridor they were met by the Police Chief. Riley spoke, "I want Senator Voorhees to identify the body. As I said, he's a C. I. man, and if the identity is positive, it is a delicate matter, close to the president, and must not be publicized, or even followed up in any manner . . ."

"Macreal!" said Senator Voorhees sharply, his face paling.

"That's what we want you to certify," said Senator Riley. "He is unknown to me, you know. But he has the C. I. identification on him, and a note found in his pocket gives the name Macreal."

Senator Voorhees said no more until they were in the morgue vaults themselves, and then, as a slab door was opened, he peered down at the face of the man on the slab. He studied it intently. "Yes," he said finally. "That's Macreal. See that no word of his death gets out, and bury the body secretly."

Without further word, he turned and walked out, followed by Riley and the Police Chief. Outside, he faced Riley. "May I see you in my office?" he asked.

"Let's go right on up," agreed Riley.

Once in the plush confines of Senator Voorhees' office, the senior senator stuck out a hand. "The note," he said. "You mentioned a note. May I see it?"

"Certainly. It was obviously addressed to you, although no name was given."

Senator Voorhees took the note Riley produced, and read it. "Diane Marlowe, eh?" he said. "In the phone book. Have you looked it up?"

"I have. I've got her address."

"Well, don't arrest her. We have only one link with our quarry now, and it's this girl. We've got to know her every movement and keep her under surveillance every second."

"My men are assigned to that job already," said Sena-

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tor Riley. "But I am wondering if that will be enough?"

"Enough?"

"Yes. If this man Macreal was the best man in C. I., we're up against the most dangerous thing possible—they got him before he was barely on the trail!"

"Can you suggest any other course we can pursue?"

Senator Riley looked back at the senior senator without speaking.

It was noon before Diane Marlowe awoke. For a long moment she lay in bed, eyes on the ceiling, then she got out of bed and slipped out of her nightdress. Going into the bathroom she took a hot bath, lying back for long minutes trying not to think. But try as she might, she could not thrust the thought of John Macreal from her. His face was before her mind's eye no matter which way she turned. So she resorted to physical action. She scrubbed herself vigorously with a bath brush and soap until her skin glowed. Then she got out of the tub, continued the rubbing with a towel until she was pink from tip to toe. She spent a whole hour fixing her hair, then turned her attention to her nails.

Finally she began to dress. She tried on several dresses, only to take them off again. But at last she put one on and kept it on. Then, when there was no further excuse to remain in her apartment, she went out and walked down the street in the afternoon sun. She felt hungry, but the thought of food only suggested the boredom of sitting alone at a restaurant table and waiting to be served.

But at last she forced herself to enter a restaurant and it was while she waited for the food to be served that she realized that she was being observed. One man was sitting at a table in the far corner apparently reading a paper. But as she entered his mind and read it, she discovered instantly that he was keeping her under close scrutiny. He was mentally noting her every action. And in his mind he was wondering what there was about her that was so terribly important.

He thought now of his companion across the street outside, and she glanced out of the window. It was true. Lounging across the street, apparently waiting for a bus, was another man. His thoughts were harder to reach from this distance, but the fact soon became apparent that both these men were fol-

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lowing her, and had instructions to keep on her trail.

She felt momentarily amused, but it faded quickly as she sought to discover how these two men had come to be trailing her. When she learned that they were working for Senator Riley, she forgot the morbid thoughts that had accompanied her ever since her awakening. Now she was alert once more to what was going on, and to her place in the events.

She ate slowly, absorbing every thought from the man in the restaurant, but learned little other than that the man intended to keep close to her, no matter what happened.

She finished her meal, motioned for the waiter, and paid him. Then she rose and went into the ladies room. She did not come out.

Back at her apartment she phoned Albert Wilson.

"I just thought I'd let you know that two men are watching my apartment and trailing me everywhere I go," she reported. "They are working for Senator Riley."

"How could they have spotted you?"

"You didn't even search Macreal's body before you dumped it into an alley or wherever you dumped it. They found that note he teleported from your pocket."

"Diane, there was no note in his pocket. I did search."

"You did?"

"Absolutely. There was nothing on him to incriminate either of us. I found his C. I. identification, but I left that on him. It might have proved significant had it been missing."

"Albert, you know how I feel about this thing! There must be a better way than violence to accomplish what we're after. There was no need to kill Macreal. He was sympathetic to us, and would not have exposed us."

Wilson's voice came angrily over the phone. "How can you believe such a thing after the way he tried to trick you into giving the names of our group? Does that seem like he didn't want to expose us?"

"I don't think so now, although I did when he was trying to hypnotize me. I think now that he only wanted to know the names so he could reach us all and try to convince us that there is a peaceful way to accomplish our ends."

"Oh . . . I see," said Wilson. "So that's where you get these ideas of non-violence? It seems that he was quite clever at convincing people. He might

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have planned such a thing, at that."

"Well, what do you think? Isn't his idea worth considering?"

"We've never considered anything else, really," said Wilson. "But we all know that if the powers that be on this planet were to get full knowledge of us, it would be a battle we couldn't possibly win, even with our unusual powers. The mere force of numbers would overcome us. Once all of us were dead, our kind might not mutate for thousands of years again, if ever. It is important that we control the world, prevent a catastrophic atomic war, while we multiply until the entire human race is sufficiently leavened so that it is not possible to prevent the new evolution from completing itself."

"Perhaps you're right. But so far the violence we have used has only resulted in the death of Macreal who was as highly evolved as any of us, if not more so."

"True. But I believe he would have used his power only to establish himself as a dictator, after eliminating us. He did try to trick you, Diane. Perhaps he was so far advanced over us that he was able to reveal false thoughts to you. Perhaps it was only the sheerest of luck for us that you acted so impulsively and transported him here so that he could be eliminated."

"Albert! Did you have to say that?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to infer that you had served as a death trap . . ."

But Diane was no longer listening. She had hung up the phone and was weeping.

After a time, she lifted her hand and stared at the ring through her tears. The diamond sparkled and the rays from it shimmered. She studied it for a moment. Then everything grew black. She shook her head sharply.

She took the ring off her finger, went to her jewel case and put it inside. "Diane Marlowe," she whispered to herself. "You've got to forget him. When you come close to fainting over him, that's too much. He's dead. You've got to forget him. You're a member of the new race of man, and you've got work to do!"

She got up, went over to her desk, wrote down the names of every member of the group, and then signed the paper. She folded it, put it into an envelope, sealed it, and addressed it to Senator Voorhees. She pasted a stamp on the envelope, then walked out to the

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corner mailbox and dropped the envelope into it. Then she went back into her apartment.

She sent her mind questing, and after a moment, teleported another top secret Pentagon file into her bedroom. She went through it methodically, memorizing everything of any importance. After several hours, as it grew dark outside, the lack of important information grew boring, and she began to yawn. At length she sank back upon her pillow and went to sleep.

As she slept, she dreamed. She dreamed that the closet door opened, and John Macreal came out. He advanced to the bed, and sat down beside her, taking her hand in his.

"I love you, Diane," he said. "Because you're so unhuman."

"Unhuman!" she cried in her dream. "I'm not unhuman, I'm a woman!"

He took her in his arms. "A *man's* woman," he said. He kissed her. Diane moaned softly in her sleep, tears forcing their way from beneath her closed eyelids.

"Men will take more of the credit," he said.

A strange look of joy overspread Diane's sleeping face, and she sank deeper into slumber.

Senator Voorhees stared at the letter in his hand and he rang for his secretary. When she came in, he handed her the empty envelope. "When did this letter come in?" he asked.

"In the first mail this morning."

"It's postmarked last night but I don't believe it. See if you can find out when and where it was picked up."

She took the envelope from him and went out. When she had gone, Senator Voorhees picked up the phone.

"Give me the chief of police," he said.

In a moment the voice of the chief sounded in his ear. "This is Senator Voorhees," he answered. "I want to ask you just one question: when did you bury John Macreal's body?"

"Immediately after you left the morgue, Senator Voorhees."

"Can I depend on that?"

"Just as certainly as the sunrise."

"I just wanted to make sure." He replaced the phone on its cradle and leaned back in his chair thoughtfully. He was still thinking when his secretary came back into the room.

"I checked it," she said. "It

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was mailed at 11:00 P.M. last night at the street box on the corner of 48th and Cockerille Avenue."

"Thank you," said Senator Voorhees. "That will be all."

He picked up the letter from his desk and looked at it again. He read the signature at the bottom aloud: "John Macreal." Then he got to his feet and went to his files. In a moment he had secured a file, and went through it carefully. Several times he compared the signature on the letter with signatures in the file. Each time he nodded, and each time he grew more puzzled. At last he gave up in bafflement and returned the file to its place. He turned his attention back to the letter, and its list of names.

A half hour later he was personally closeted with the F. B. I head, and together they worked out a plan of attack. Twenty-seven different teams of agents were briefed and sent into action, with the same instructions to all.

"Don't attack until a kill is certain—and don't miss the first time, because you'll not get a second chance!" Senator Voorhees' face was deadly serious as he uttered the words with all the impressiveness he could muster.

The phone rang in Diane Marlowe's apartment several times before she answered it. As she picked up the receiver she noted that the time was nearly noon. She had slept like one dead.

"Diane?" It was the voice of Albert Wilson. "Teleport yourself to the rendezvous immediately! This is a general alarm!"

"The rendezvous!" she gasped. "But what . . . ?"

"Seven of our members have already been killed! All the rest are either already at the rendezvous or have been warned."

"I'll be there in a moment!"

She hung up the receiver in a daze. Seven killed. It could only mean a concerted attack, and that meant that their identities were known. Her mind flew to the moment when John Macreal had held his ring sparkling before her, and had asked for the complete list of names . . .

"Oh!" she gasped aloud. "Albert was right. He *did* hypnotize me!"

Swiftly she dressed, then with equal haste she stuffed the Pentagon files back in their drawers and teleported the file case back to its place. With a hasty glance around to see if she'd forgotten anything else, she concentrated on the ren-

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dezvous and vanished from the room.

With the passage of scarcely an instant, she found herself standing in the control room of the *North Star*, far beneath the surface of the sea off Sandy Hook. Thirteen men and six women were already in the submarine, besides Albert Wilson, who stood in the doorway of an adjoining room.

"Come in here, Diane!" called Wilson. "Hurry, we haven't much time . . ."

Diane looked at him peculiarly, then suddenly she stiffened.

"All of you are going through the multiplication tables in your minds! You are trying to hide all your thoughts . . ."

Behind her one of the men lunged forward and stiff-armed her through the door of the little room. The picture of her apartment flashed into her mind as she went sprawling, and she held it grimly, even though her head crashed against the wall, nigh stunning her. But nothing happened. As she stumbled to her feet, she found herself still in the tiny room on the submarine.

"Electronic detention!" she cried. "You've got this room rigged with a detainer . . ."

She rushed for the door, but Wilson slammed it in her face. She heard the lock snap, and under her hands the door remained immovable. Faintly she heard Wilson's voice beyond the panel.

"You won't be harmed, Diane. But until we are sure you were hypnotized into giving those names to the authorities, we will have to assume you are unsympathetic to our cause. And obviously, we cannot allow you to be at liberty."

She was silent an instant. "I understand," she said. "But I am not aware of having given any names to anybody. So it must have been hypnosis."

"Then the best thing you can do is to remain quiet and attempt nothing until we have accomplished our mission."

"And what is that?"

"We are going to atom-bomb Washington. Everyone who knows our secret must be wiped out, and as swiftly as possible."

"But that will start an atomic war!" she cried. "They will be sure the Russians did it!"

"Obviously," said Wilson. "But I have decided that an atomic war will solve most of our problem. Once the bulk of the Earth's population is elim-

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inated, we can take over what is left, and let the new race develop unhindered while the old race dies out through sterility, which is meaningless to us."

"Albert!" screamed Diane. "You can't do it that way! That's inhuman. It's mass murder. It's worse than the most horrible dictatorship . . ."

"It's the only way," came Wilson's voice. "And once we have bombed Washington, you will realize that there is nothing you can do, except to resign yourself to the course of events—and when it is all over, we will make a new world together, you and I."

Diane, staring at the blankness of the door before her, recoiled in horror. She was utterly helpless. And even though her mind tore furiously at the barrier of the electronic detainer, it could not penetrate the minds of anyone of her former comrades in a bloodless revolution that was now to become the bloodiest of revolutions. The electronic field was impervious to all psi powers. Not even her telepathic ability was of any avail. She could do nothing.

She dropped to her knees on the floor of the tiny room. Apparent in the steel plates of the floor beneath her body was the throb of the atomic-powered engines as they bore the *North Star* smoothly and swiftly on her way. Soon, she knew, Wilson would launch the rockets loaded with hydrogen warheads, and in a matter of minutes, Washington would be no more.

In her mind's eye rose the face of the one man who could have saved the situation. She prayed.

"Oh, John," she whispered. "If you were only alive . . ."

A pair of strong hands lifted her to her feet, and she turned in startled amazement, blinking through her tears. Smiling down at her was the face of John Macreal. He kissed her.

"Does that prove I am alive?"

Desperately she clutched him to her, feeling his body beneath her hands as though to further confirm the evidence of her senses. Her mind entered his, and recognized every nuance of his personality.

"It's you!" she sobbed. "It's really you, alive! Oh, John!"

He kissed her again.

"But how . . . ?" she gasped. "How?"

"Remember what I said about the creative medium of the oversoul?" he asked. "Don't you realize the truth—that to be able to create solely

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with the mind is to be immortal?"

"Immortal?"

"Yes. The body can be killed, but the entity cannot. And it is just as easy for the oversoul to re-clothe itself in a body identical with the one lost as it is to put on a new suit of clothes. Thus, although my original body is dead and buried, I am now alive, identical in physical form, through the creative power of my mind. None of us of the new race can really die. We are all immortal!"

"Wilson said seven of us were already dead!" exclaimed Diane. "Aren't they, really? Will they realize that they can create a new body for themselves?"

"Diane," said Macreal seriously. "You've been deluded. Those seven who are dead will remain dead. They were not members of the Third Race of Man."

"Not members . . . ?" she faltered. "But then what . . . ?"

"They are members of a race from another solar system, here to take over the planet with their hypnotic powers. They found you had similar powers, such as the ability to teleport, and they took you as one of them, because they had only six women. They were the only ones able to adapt themselves to life on this planet, and they needed every woman they could get to foster their future growth as an Earth-born race. They were the seed planted here by their home planet. If they fail to propagate, the attempt will have been considered a failure, and thus abandoned as a possibility.

"Didn't you see the truth in those Pentagon files, all those 'fake' communications, those 'secrets' the saucer people were supposed to be communicating to Earth's military officials? These were only to provide the weapons with which man on Earth could accomplish his own destruction. They were baiting mankind.

Diane's eyes widened, and the truth was in them. "They *were* fakes," she said. "The messages were not coming from saucers at all, but from Wilson! The saucers—all illusions, created mentally!"

"Exactly."

"But now Wilson's going to hydrogen-bomb Washington! It will start an atomic war that will wipe out mankind! Those who do not die in the bombings will be sterile, and the next generation will belong to the invaders from that other solar system!"

"Did Wilson tell you that

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was the purpose of the *North Star?*"

"Yes! And, John, we're helpless! This room is contained in an electronic detainer. Our powers won't work here. We are prisoners. Oh, why did you teleport yourself into this room!"

"You called me," said Macreal. "The electronic detainer may bar your body from transit beyond its influence, but it couldn't hold back your love. I heard, and I came."

Diane looked at him, her eyes wide with hopelessness. "Then there's nothing we can do! Wilson and his companions have won!"

Macreal smiled down at her and kissed her again.

"Think," he said. "I could no more have teleported myself *into* this room than you can teleport yourself *out* of it, if the electronic detainer is a nullifier of my powers. But I am here!"

She looked at him, and her stare grew incredulous. "You *are* much further advanced than I am, or Wilson, or any of the other world people! I'm convinced of that now."

"Not further advanced than *you,*" he said. "Wilson, yes. But not you."

"Then how . . . ?" she was bewildered.

"Hold tight to my mind," he said. "Then will your heart to stop."

"Commit suicide?" she asked dazedly.

"Yes. These walls cannot hold Death a prisoner. Think yourself dead, just as you think yourself somewhere else in the physical, and cling to me. We will be together when we reach our destination, recreate your body with an effort of your creative will. Then we'll see what Albert Wilson is able to do!"

He bent his head and pressed his lips to hers. She clung to him desperately, and willed her heart to stop. Blackness swept over her slowly like a gigantic wave, but in it remained a spark of light. She recognized the light, and knew it for the immortal life that was John Macreal. The light merged with hers, and it seemed that she was one with him. Thought came from somewhere and said: "We *are* one!"

Then all at once she was standing beside him on the beach of Sandy Hook, the afternoon sun warm on her neck, John Macreal's arms around her tightly.

"Look out there, into the sea," he said. "Before I left I increased the amount of uranium in the power pile of the

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North Star. It has gone critical."

"It'll explode!" exclaimed Diane.

"Nothing can prevent it now," said Macreal, "except you and I."

Diane stared wordlessly at the glistening expanse of the ocean.

"I won't prevent it," she said.

The sun seemed to boil up out of the Atlantic, two hundred miles away. They stared at it fascinated.

"The universe is ours," she whispered. "Immortal and everlasting!"

"And I take most of the credit," he boasted, teasingly.

She looked up at him. "How so?"

"I signed the letter giving the names of the plotters to the Senator," he said, "which enabled us to create the emergency that got the survivors together where we could eliminate them all."

"*You* signed the letter?"

"Certainly. You were hypnotized by my ring last night, on a post-hypnotic suggestion. So you see, the credit is mine."

She looked at him a moment, then smiled. "You can have the credit. I'll *still* have the babies!"

"All right," he said. "But let's get back to Washington. I've got to report to Senator Voorhees."

"Report to Senator Voorhees?"

"Yes. I'm still working for him, you know. I've got to report the success of my mission, and see what I can do to make him see the error of his ways. I have an idea he'll listen to reason. After all, he's one of our evolutionary forebears."

"That's nice of you," she said.

"Nice?"

"Yes. You're not taking *all* of the credit. You're even giving some to the Senator!"

"It'll make him feel a little better," said Macreal.

"Invite him to dinner this evening," said Diane, "and I'll tell him. And besides, a good meal will help to foster relationships between the two Races."

THE END

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"The civilized ones are at it again!"

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ACCORDING TO YOU....

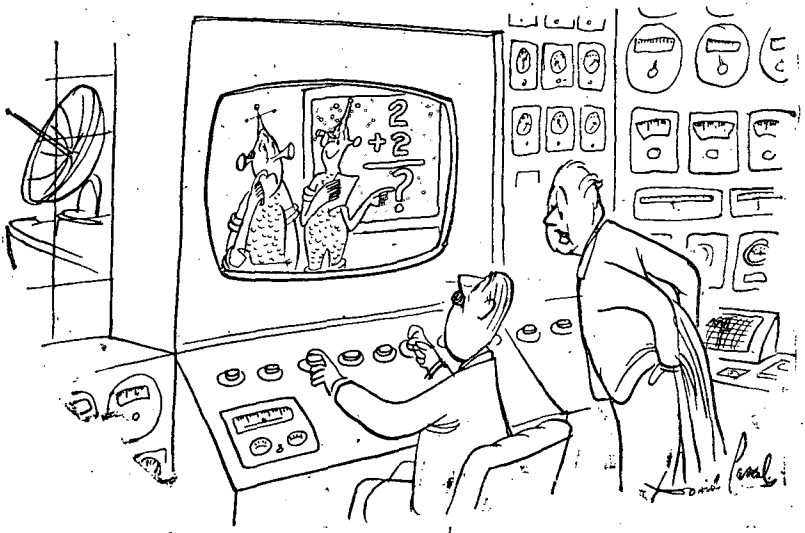
Dear Editor:

I like "The Jewel Of Ecstasy." I'm wondering if it is possible to get some more real good stories like "Small Town" and "Fugitive From Space" that appeared back in the May 1954 issue of *Amazing*.

I think that right about that time was when both *Amazing* and *Fantastic* were on top of the whole world.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Alabama

○ *Your nomination of the May 1954 issue as tops, duly noted and filed. There have been many such nominations through the years and there will be many more. Incidentally, Contest letters are pouring in. Remember—three monthly prizes, $25.00—$10.00—$5.00. Be sure and get your letter in. You may be in the money.*



"Well, now we know there's life on Mars. But is it intelligent?"

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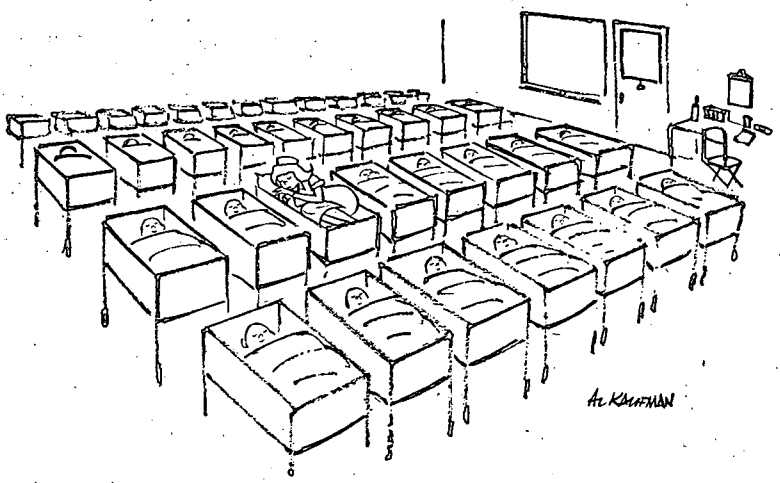

Dear Editor:

After reading the December issue of *Fantastic* I would like to be cleared up on a point. In one of my letters to *Amazing* I said that Mr. Fairman wrote "Children of Chaos" and "The Penal Cluster." Now I'm not so sure. The style of both stories was like some of the stories he used to write.

There are two things missing in practically all of your stories. They are a good plot and suspense. How about some stories of the weird and supernatural that will curl our hair such as the ones Bloch used to write for *Weird Tales?*

Danny Pritchett
228 West Bridgeport St.
White Hall, Ill.

○ *Fairman wrote neither of the two stories you mention. Glad you're a fan of Robert Bloch. By a strange coincidence there will soon appear in* Fantastic, *"some stories of the weird and supernatural that will curl our hair" by Robert Bloch.*

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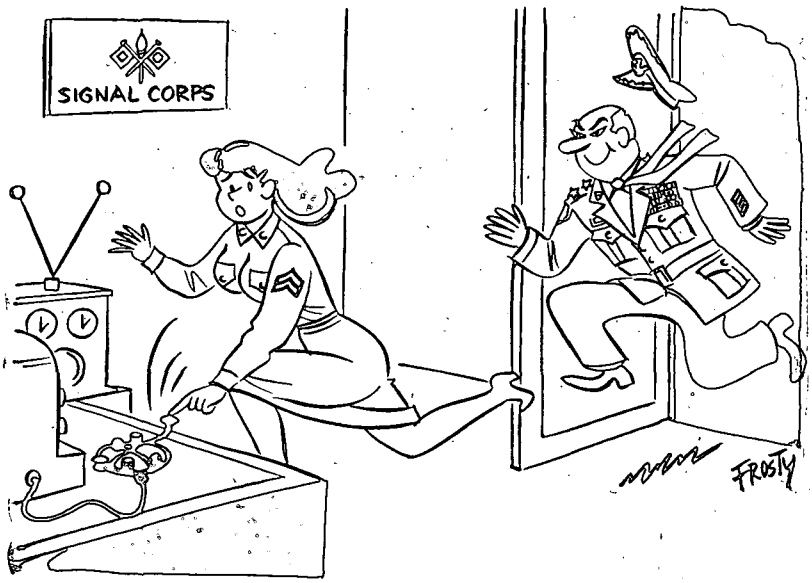
Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading the February 1958 issue of *Fantastic* and I would like to agree with the other letters that are shown in your letter section. I have been reading s-f for over five years and I agree that s-f is not what it was once but that is no reason to turn your magazine into a sex magazine. Aside from the stories in which sex is stressed I think that *Fantastic* is up with (if not the best) science fiction. Out of this particular issue I preferred "A Code For Unbelievers" the best.

Ira Glass
1411 Townsend Ave.
Bronx 52, N. Y.

o *So far, "A Code For Unbelievers," and "I Married a Martian" are running neck and neck for top preference in the February issue.*



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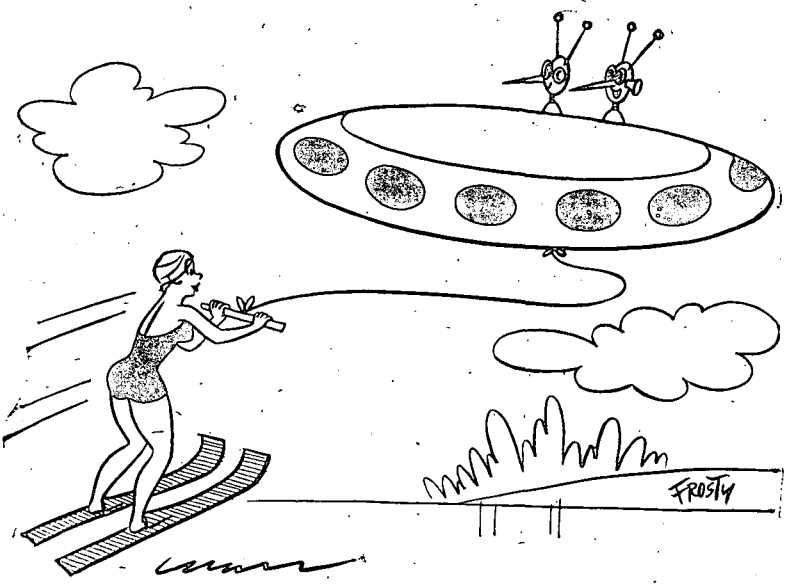

"She wants us to put her in orbit. Says she needs the publicity."

Dear Ed:

I had a gripping urge to tear off the Valigursky cover and then the editorial page with it. Of course, I couldn't do that, because I would then be missing the contents page. "Jewel Of Ecstasy" by Slesar was remarkably good for *Fantastic*. An extra 15,000 words could have done more for it though. The shorts, while for the most part being fair, will be passed over in silence.

The letter column intrigued me. Is Vince Roach the same guy who used to haunt other letter pages? Danny Pritchett: you are wrong. If memory serves right, Don Wilcox wrote "Iron Men" February '52 *Amazing*.

Don Kent
3800 Wellington
Chicago, Ill.

⊙ *If our files are ever stolen, Don, we're going to quiz you on who wrote what in the old issues.*

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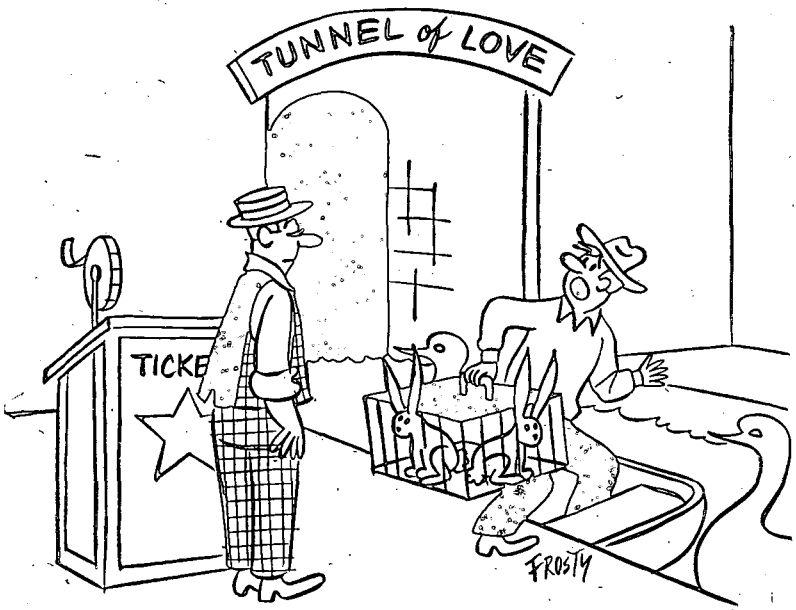
Dear Editor:

Just finished the February *Fantastic* and I must say that I like your new format. I thought that you were going to drop the science fiction bi-line though and just call it *Fantastic*. The new *Fantastic* is similar to your discontinued *Dream World*. I was always sorry to see that go, but now I'm glad to see a good fantasy mag back on the stands.

You must have either read my letters or someone else's because you gave art credits in the February *Fantastic*. I like giving artists their due credit.

Peter Francis Skeberdis
606 Crapo St.
Flint 3, Michigan

◎ *The science fiction subhead vanishes from* Fantastic *with the February issue. It will be replaced in the near future with a brand new subhead: "Fact And Fiction."*



"I've tried everything—maybe it's atmosphere they need."

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Coming In The MAY AMAZING—

1. Though laid in the year 2024, this is a story of today in that our children will know that time. It is a time of disillusionment, panic, terror. The space dream has been shattered and the people cling desperately to a planet upon which destruction has blanked out the future and economic chaos is the order of the day. Stripped even of hope, they revert to the old weaknesses and are willing to trade their gains, their freedom, their self-respect for a new Napoleon, a second Hitler, an iron-fisted Caesar. This is an overpowering story of what happens in a world ripe for dictatorship, its people looking skyward—not for a blessing from heaven, but for—

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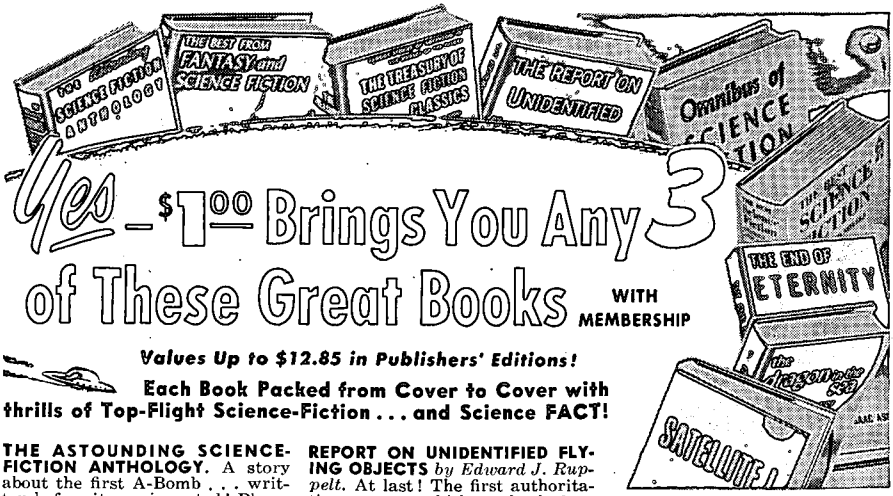
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